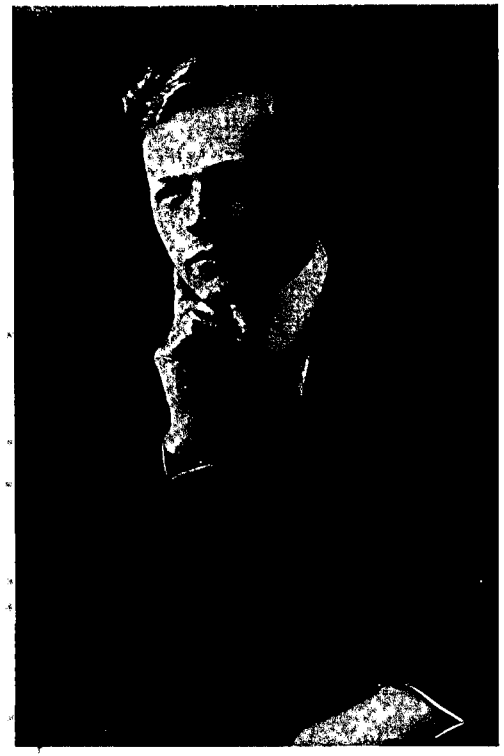

On the Left in America

Memoirs of the Scandinavian-American Labor Movement

By Henry Bengston

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Edited and with an Introduction
by Michael Brook

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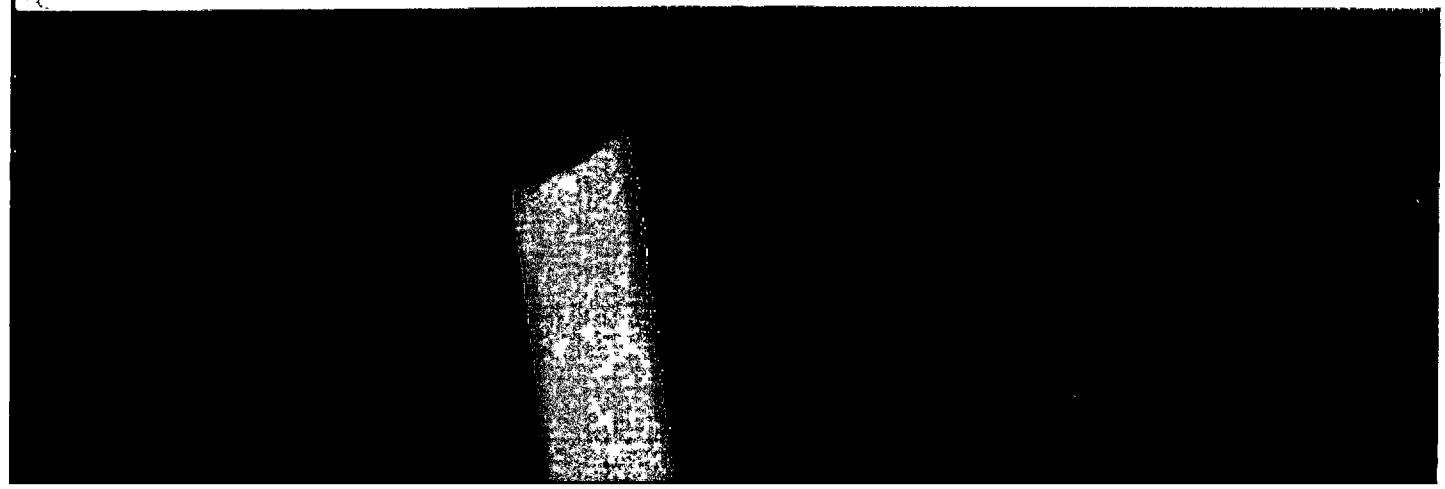
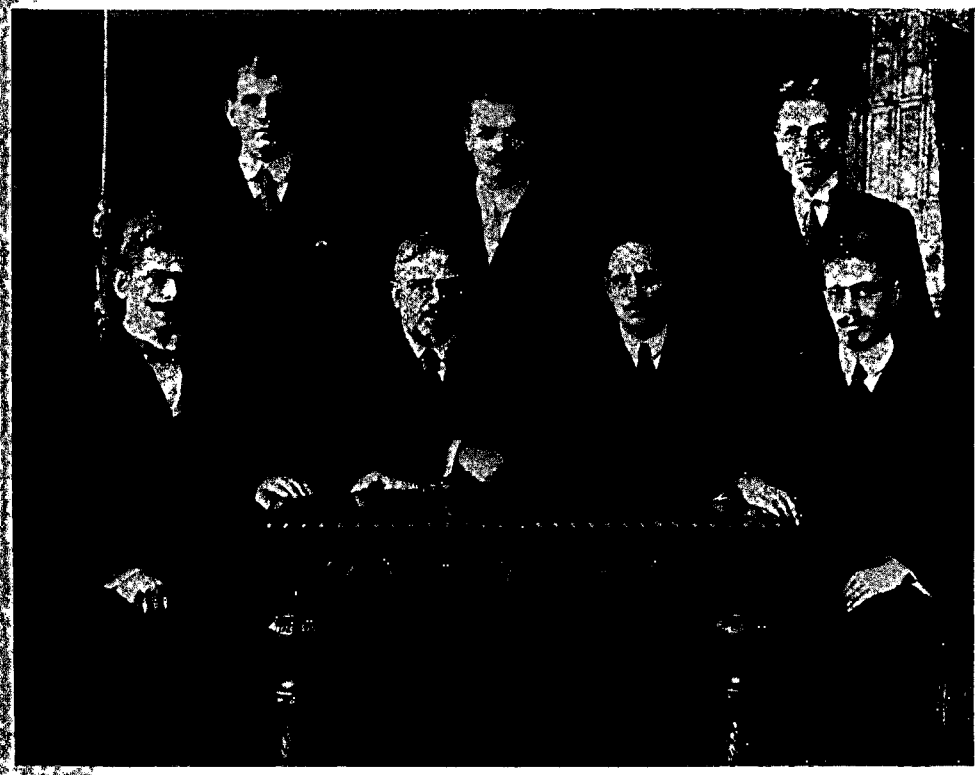


SLP Club in Lake View, and following a short period of training at "Mollberg University," he was well prepared to go to the attack against the Socialist Party positions. He also became a contributor to the Federation newspaper *Arbetaren*.

When the SLP federation broke up in 1920, Björk and the other members of the Chicago club declared their loyalties to the faction that later merged with the Communists. Since that time [1955], he has supported the Communist party line with the same enthusiasm he once showed De Leonism. In 1925, he returned to Sweden on a visit and called on his old party comrades. One can well imagine their give-and-take on mutual ideological issues and developments over the preceding twenty years. Björk extended his visit to Russia, where he apparently found his dreams fulfilled. In a small pamphlet entitled *Röda Vikingar* (Red Vikings), he described his experiences in the Soviet Union and expressed satisfaction with what he had seen of the Soviet experiment. Björk is presently active in the International Association of Machinists.

A Chicago baker by the name of Adolf Carm was for many years a ruthless critic of the Socialist Party. A good speaker and debater, Carm never passed up an opportunity to lash out at the Debs party, which he so violently opposed. His self-assured bearing and dictatorial airs, however, won him enemies in his own camp, and he gradually lost all influence in the SLP. On one occasion, he put in an appearance as an organizer for the SLP-supported wing of the IWW, but his efforts failed to stimulate this hopeless experiment in resolving the problem of industrial unionism. Carm clearly took pleasure in assailing the Vincent St. John-William D. Haywood section of the IWW as well as the old archenemy, the AFL. During his heyday in the SLP, Carm made a name for himself as a contributor to *Arbetaren* and was, at one time, rewarded with a trip to Sweden by the Swedish-America Line, which had invited representatives from all sectors of the Swedish-American press.



1. First officers of the Swedish Educational League. *Standing, left to right,* Carl Swanson, Nils Linnberg, Carl Person; *seated, left to right,* Ludvig Holmstrom, Aksel G. S. Josephson, G. L. Larson, P. J. Berggren. Courtesy Swedish-American Archives of Greater Chicago, PN 23.

by many years of service to the SLP and its Swedish federation, and even if he and I did not always agree on things, he remained a personal friend of mine. He was a natural subject for an interview, as his story is also a bit of history.

Whenever Björk and I got together, we had a habit of locking horns on issues of labor politics. When I first met him, he was working as a chauffeur and spending his free time as one of the most dedicated supporters, in all of Chicago, of the Swedish De Leon federation.

Gustaf Björk was easy to like: no one else had his fighting spirit, and no one was more sure of himself or ready to campaign for De Leonism. His greatest pleasure was to assail members of the Socialist Party. If he ran into a member of the "mushroom party," as the SP was sometimes called because of its comparatively rapid growth, he considered it a matter of personal honor to convert the SP-er to the one and only doctrine of salvation, the Socialist Labor Party. However hopeless the conversion prospect and however heated the debate, Gustaf was always ready to end things with a handshake and a good-natured joke about the impossibility of knocking any sense into an SP-blockhead.

As I knew of Björk's past in the Swedish labor movement, I asked him to tell me about it, which he gladly did. Memories from his childhood and youth were uppermost in his mind, and it was refreshing for him to review them once again.

A native of the province of Södermanland, Björk was the son of migrant farm workers.[11] Finding rural life monotonous, he made his way to Stockholm in 1905, where he found work as an assistant to a master gardener. It soon dawned on him, however, that a working-class lad had to work just as hard for his wages in the big city as he did out on the farm. He had nothing against hard work, but he did want fair wages for his sweat and toil. When he heard about plans to start a trade union there, his interest was immediate, and together with others, he helped to establish the Enskede Gardeners' Union (Enskede trädgårdsarbetarefackförening). He also joined Stockholm's North Side Social-Democratic Young People's Club (Norra socialdemokratiska ungdomsklubb), where his youthful enthusiasm soon gave him a niche in socialist propaganda circles. Elected a sales agent for the newspaper *Fram*, he surpassed everyone's expectations with his expertise.[12] He also helped to smuggle copies of Leo Tolstoy's antiwar pamphlet *Bethink Yourselves* into military barracks in Sweden.[13] Björk was not concerned about the fact that this could have cost him six months in prison, but he was shrewd enough to elude the long arm of the law.

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Björk was also on hand when Zeth Höglund, Hjalmar Gustafson, Fabian Månsson, Kata Dalström, and others started the newspaper *Stormklockan*, for which Björk and Carl Ståhlbärj served as office managers.[14] After two years' employment with the newspaper, Björk caught the "America fever," which brought to a close his career in the Swedish labor movement. Landing in Boston in the spring of 1910, he was met by an old union acquaintance from Stockholm by the name of Anna Håkansson. A few years earlier, Björk had sold her the very first share certificate in the *Stormklockan* enterprise at a cost of 100 Swedish crowns.

Björk's ultimate destination was Chicago, and one July day in 1910, he arrived in that city all on his own, his mind full of questions. No one met him at the station, and he could not very well ask for directions for the simple reason that he did not know a word of English. Young Gustaf probably felt less certain of things at that moment than at any time during his anticapitalist crusade with *Stormklockan* and the Stockholm North Side Social-Democratic Young People's Club. He did have an address in his pocket, however, which kept his spirits up. This would lead him to a house on School Street and the residence of the widow of an old socialist friend by the name of Mollberg. That, at any rate, was his immediate destination, but getting there in a city the size of Chicago was another matter. After a moment's reflection, he decided to spend the night in a nearby flophouse and try to locate the School Street address the following day.

Early next morning, Björk boarded a streetcar and showed the Mollberg address to the conductor, thinking that if the streetcar were headed in the right direction he would stay aboard; otherwise, he would have to try his luck in the opposite direction. The conductor first looked at the address and then at Björk, but instead of gushing off a stream of unintelligible English, he simply asked in Swedish, "Are you a Swede, lad?" (Är du svensk, pojke?). He most certainly was and infinitely happy to hear someone speak his native language right in the middle of a strange city. With the conductor's help, he soon boarded the right streetcar and found his way to Mrs. Mollberg's boardinghouse.

Björk quickly made himself at home in his new surroundings. Mrs. Mollberg's boardinghouse was a long established headquarters for Swedish members of the SLP. Those who were not already socialists when they moved to Mollberg's were almost forced to adopt the SLP doctrine at the risk of being branded reactionaries or political illiterates, pure and simple. In any event, this was not the roost for birds of a different feather.

As far as Björk was concerned, his acceptance of De Leonism needed no convincing argumentation. He immediately joined the Scandinavian

things by challenging me to a debate. Fully aware of my deficiencies as a debater, especially if I were to match wits with a professional and stand a chance of success, I was nevertheless willing to take up the challenge, but my colleagues prevented me from doing so. Apparently they did not want to risk defeat, and they were right. "Stick to your typewriter," they warned, and that was that.

By that time, Furstenberg had already made a distinguished career for himself in the SLP. He joined the Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation shortly after his arrival in America and became a member of the Cambridge, Massachusetts, club. In Sweden he had been active in the Federation of Young Socialists, an organization that had a genuine flare for enthusiasm and hard work and left its stamp on him when he came to this country. That he was able to overcome his Young Socialist aversion to parliamentary reformism stemmed, as he said himself, from the SLP's position on industrial unionism as opposed to trade unionism. The rest of the SLP platform also appealed to him and seemed to offer the best solution to the class antagonisms in the United States.

Though only twenty-two years old at the time, Furstenberg was elected to the post of Federation secretary at the 1908 convention but not without opposition. Many of his older compatriots were afraid that because of his youth he did not have a firm grasp of De Leonist principles, but their fears were unfounded. Furstenberg turned out to be a faithful adherent of party doctrine as well as an exceptionally devoted Federation secretary. The very next year he was given the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities as an organizer, when the Federation assigned him the task of heading up its fund-raising campaign on behalf of the striking workers in Sweden. Among other things, he worked out a travel itinerary for the two representatives of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, who were sent to America in an effort to win support for the strikers' cause.[7] Furstenberg accomplished this task so ably that before the LO representatives returned home, more than $30,000 had been sent under his name alone from the Federation headquarters in New York. At the time, this was an exceptionally respectable sum of money, especially in view of the fact that it was augmented by cash donations sent directly from the campaign meetings held by the LO representatives during their American tour.

The Federation itself stood to gain from this period of activity, particularly from the publicity it received in Swedish communities across the country. At the close of the campaign, the Federation's forty-odd clubs had a total membership of close to fifteen hundred. While not a particularly impressive set of statistics, it did spell a remarkable success for the Federation which, up to that time, was only represented in major American cities. In the wake of its efforts on behalf of the striking Swedish workers, however, the Federation launched a massive propaganda campaign, primarily through the columns of *Arbetaren* but also in the form of lecture tours and distribution of leaflets. During Furstenberg's term as Federation secretary, about fifty thousand leaflets, most of them translations of Daniel De Leon's works, were distributed by local clubs.

All of these developments did not mean that there was complete unanimity among the Federation membership. An indication of this came at the Federation convention in 1908, when the executive board was told to try to secure a successor to A. H. Lyzell as editor of *Arbetaren*. The board deferred the responsibility to its secretary, asking him to publicize the editorial vacancy and negotiate with prospective candidates. Lyzell was not without friends, however, who raised a hue and cry at these proceedings and vented their particular disfavor on Furstenberg. In order to soothe their ruffled feelings and spare the Federation further dissension, Furstenberg decided to resign as Federation secretary in the fall of 1910. A new editor was never appointed, and Lyzell remained at the helm of *Arbetaren* for at least a decade.

After his resignation, Furstenberg settled down in Cleveland and, later on, in the little town of Ravenna, Ohio. The work of the Federation still held his interest, however, and on several occasions he volunteered his services as an itinerant speaker, making extended tours in the eastern and midwestern states. Following the Russian Revolution, he joined the American Communist faction and, during the Depression of the 1930s, took part in efforts to organize the unemployed. In 1930 [1932?], he accompanied a delegation to the Soviet Union and attended the Moscow celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

Another gifted talent in the SLP federation was Sven Assarson, a respected contributor to *Arbetaren* and a popular public speaker.[8] Other leading figures included Gustaf Rudquist in Boston and C. J. Björklund in New York, but as their activities were confined to the East Coast they were largely unknown to us in the SP federation in Chicago.[9]

The greater strength of the New York section, compared with its Chicago counterpart, resided in the fact that New York served as the headquarters of the Federation's executive board and the home of the Federation newspaper *Arbetaren*. The Chicago section was not without its own dynamic personalities, however, among whom were Adolf Carm, who sometimes was at odds with the Federation; Einar Israelson; and the indefatigable radical, Gustaf Björk.[10] The last named distinguished himself

recollections. They had no problem remembering which clubs they belonged to, which conventions they attended, and which offices they held, but recalling a specific date or event in the proper sequence was another matter. Their memory of the major milestones in the federation's history was still very much alive, and one could not really blame them if, after thirty or forty years, the exact sequence of events was a bit disjointed.

My first contact was my old friend William Nelson, whom I had met as far back as 1910 and recognized as one of the more tolerant members of the SLP.[2] Nelson began his career in the labor movement as a trade unionist in the Swedish city of Helsingborg. Prior to his emigration from Sweden, he had been chairman of the local union chapter of unskilled workers but had become sympathetic, according to his own report, to the syndicalist movement. On his arrival in Chicago in 1909, he joined the Swedish SLP club, presumably for the simple reason that his first contacts were with members of that club. In general, however, he was liberal enough in his views to have felt at home among followers of the Socialist Party. SP-ers and SLP-ers, or De Leonists, as the latter were also called in honor of their leader, were popular epithets used by members of the two socialist parties in reference to each other, and there was little disguising their true feelings when they hurled these about. In the eyes of the opposing camp, an SLP-er was a narrow- minded sectarian who had far more regard for party doctrine than practical results. On the other side of the scale, an SP-er was considered a lowly pawn in a strike-it-rich party, whose major purpose was to fatten the political status of its power elite.

William Nelson did not consider himself an expert on the history of his own federation and instead recalled the propaganda activities of the club in which he had held office for many years. The Lake View Club in Chicago had many powerful campaign speakers, he said, and one in particular was Carl Iverson, a gifted pamphlet writer and a leading figure in club circles.[3] Like Nelson, Iverson had received his first socialist schooling in Sweden and had a brother who won a seat in the Swedish Parliament as a Social Democrat. Iverson soon grew tired of urban life and bought a farm in Wisconsin, where he later died. He retained his club affiliation, however, and was a frequent contributor to the New York newspaper *Arbetaren*.

Nelson later referred me to C. J. Hyllander, another immigrant from the province of Skåne, who joined the federation as early as 1902 and served it prominently for many years.[4] Even Hyllander was a bit uncertain, however, when it came to putting his recollections into chronological order. The events of his youth were still fresh in his memory, despite his seventy or so years, and there was no feigned enthusiasm on his part when he recalled

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the struggles and sacrifices of the early days. Unfortunately, Hyllander had none of this on paper, and after almost fifty years, even the best of memories tend to lose track of the exact course of events. At the time I interviewed him, he owned a tailoring shop in Chicago, but his earliest memories from the old federation days were centered in and around New York, where he spent his first years after immigration. Prior to his arrival in the United States, he had lived in the Swedish port city of Gothenburg, earning his living as a tailor. It was because of a labor dispute in which he was blacklisted by his employers that he decided to leave for America.

When he joined the Scandinavian Socialist Club of New York, Hyllander made the acquaintance of A. H. Lyzell, editor of *Arbetaren*, who introduced him to party leader Daniel De Leon as a new SLP recruit. "Well, that makes four of us, then," was De Leon's comment as he welcomed Hyllander. This laconic greeting was a reference to the SLP's minimal membership figures in the wake of the major party split. Those who had left the party had jokingly asserted that the SLP was now reduced to only two members, besides De Leon himself.

When the SLP split in 1899, the Scandinavian Federation declared its loyalty to the De Leon faction, adopting De Leon's theory of Marxism as its guiding principle.[5] The Federation newspaper *Arbetaren* supported the party platform with just as much enthusiasm as De Leon's own paper *The Daily People*. No deviation from the prescribed platform was tolerated, as illustrated by one of Hyllander's own recollections from his years with the Federation.

On one occasion, he subjected a new member to a typical test by leading him into an ideological discussion, where Hyllander played the devil's advocate. Once the novice had demonstrated that he was a loyal, principled Marxist and tailored to the SLP cloth, Hyllander showed his hand and welcomed him as a true Marxist. On this particular occasion, the new member, a man by the name of Aron Furstenberg, passed with flying colors.[6] He was later engaged by the Federation as an itinerant speaker, and in this and other capacities, he was doubtlessly one of the strongest forces in the organization. Both he and Hyllander were members of the Federation's executive board for many years.

Furstenberg would have been a rewarding interview subject, but as he lived in Ohio at the time, the distance factor was prohibitive. By way of correspondence, however, I was able to gain an idea of his activities in the SLP federation. Though I had known him by name for many years, our paths had never crossed, for reasons that are my own. In 1913, I believe it was, Furstenberg came to Chicago during a propaganda tour and began

American workers, most of its membership consisting of lumberjacks, textile workers, miners, and railroad construction workers. On the whole, it can be said that the IWW never fulfilled the hopes of its organizers, but it did keep alive the idea of industrial trade unionism so that when the time was ripe it could take the form of a true mass organization, though under another name and a different leadership. This task fell to the Congress of Industrial Organizations, popularly called the CIO, which several decades later gained control of industrial unionization efforts and made itself a factor to be reckoned with in the economic sector of the American labor movement.

8

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The contributions of Swedish immigrants to the labor movement of their adopted country are interesting in their own right, but the full story can never be told. Anyone beginning research on the subject will make the startling, but painfully obvious, discovery that the passage of time has dealt harshly with much of the historical documentation left by these organizations. Preoccupied with the struggles of their own era, the organizations overlooked the importance of preserving their records and impressions for posterity. Consequently, there are no archives to turn to and, therefore, very few publications, minute books, or even newspapers to draw upon in sketching a picture of a half century of organized Swedish labor in this country.[1] Not one complete annual volume of *Arbetaren* (New York) and *Svenska Socialisten* (Rockford and Chicago), or the latter's successor *Ny Tid* (Chicago and New York), is known to exist, despite the fact that these papers functioned as official federation spokesmen for more than thirty years.

One rewarding source of information still remains, namely, the personal recollections of persons who were active in those organizations at one time or another. Yet in my own attempts to track down these pioneers and relive with them the events of the past decades, I was constantly made aware of the fact that their ranks have begun to thin out. This was borne out especially during my research of the early years of the Skandinaviska Socialistiska Arbetareförbundet (The Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation), the elder of the two Scandinavian federations and a constituent member of the SLP. As I myself was never a member of that federation but wanted to piece together its internal history as impartially as possible, it was only natural that I turned directly to former members and organizers and gave them an opportunity to tell their own stories. It was an interesting experience, to say the least, to sit down with them and listen to their recollections of the days when they zealously recruited other immigrant Swedes for the SLP cause.

During those conversations, we forgot the many personal differences of opinion that in times past frequently left us on diametrically opposite sides of the fence, with no love lost between us. It was no easy task, however, to press for concise details or inject a sense of chronological order in their

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paper's readership: one day, without warning, the editors announced that their antiwar stance was no longer valid and that in the future they intended to work for an Allied victory.

Naturally, this complete about-face was interpreted as treason by subscribers, and with that the mission of *Appeal to Reason* as an organ of socialist propaganda was over. Although it continued publishing for a year or so under the title *The American Appeal*, its circulation was a shadow of what it once was, and its reputation as a working-class newspaper was permanently eclipsed.

3

An Idealist's Uphill Struggle

My acquaintance with the American socialist press reawakened my interest in the labor movement, and in the summer of 1908, I invited a group of young immigrant Swedes to a meeting at the Finnish workers' hall to discuss the possibility of forming a Swedish socialist club in Port Arthur. Though young and inexperienced myself, I still knew more about the labor movement than any of the others, and it therefore fell to my lot to lead the meeting and try to convince those lesser inclined of the importance of membership in a socialist organization. The meeting resulted in the voluntary association of some twenty persons to establish a club, and a decision was made to apply for a charter from the Socialist Party of Canada.

A rather unpleasant surprise, however, was in store for me during this meeting. Quite unexpectedly, my uncle entered the hall in the company of two other prominent Port Arthur citizens. The three gentlemen followed our deliberations with obvious interest but otherwise remained passive onlookers. At the end of the meeting, however, my uncle warned me in friendly but serious tones about the dangerous step I was taking, one that could only spell ruin for my future. Socialism had absolutely no prospects of success in America, he said, and he hoped that I did not intend to waste my time with such foolishness. He pointed out that Canada had two political parties, the Liberal and the Conservative, and that, in his opinion, there was no room for a third. My uncle was himself a Liberal and an active supporter of the party's political campaigns. Political interest was a virtue, he said, but he advised me in true fatherly fashion to limit my political activity to a party that had a future ahead of it.

I thanked my uncle for his friendly advice but firmly refused his invitation to become involved in bourgeois politics. My choice of a political party was made, and I was not going to change my mind. My well-meaning uncle probably did not expect me to follow his advice, but at least he had done what he could to keep his imprudent nephew from wandering astray in the political wilds of this new country.

Our new club never presented a threat to anyone. The Socialist Party of Canada was apparently loosely organized at the time, and the charter we applied for never materialized. That was of minor importance, and we really could have existed as an independent club if our members had remained in the area long enough to keep the enterprise alive. Within the

ish-American press, even though its political color limited its readership.[2] Nordman had evidently begun his political career in Sweden: he is mentioned, in any event, in Hjalmar Branting's work *Socialismens århundrade*. When I started reading the paper in 1908, the editor was A. H. Lyzell. Several years later, the editorial staff included Thor Borg, a Swedish-speaking Finn from Chicago. Under the leadership of these two persons, *Arbetaren* won a respected position among the foreign-language labor press in this country.

By reading *Arbetaren*, I became rather well acquainted with the Socialist Labor Party, at least its better sides, but I also learned something about the Socialist Party (SP), the second and larger labor party in the United States. According to *Arbetaren*, the only thing socialist about the SP was its name: in reality, it was an opportunistic, winner-take-all party, whose primary purpose was to provide fat political jobs for its own functionaries. Whether this was true or not, I could not determine, of course, but I decided at the first opportunity to familiarize myself with that party's political platform through the columns of its own newspaper. That opportunity presented itself shortly thereafter when I learned that a Swedish club in Rockford, Illinois, which belonged to the SP, published a paper called *Svenska Socialisten* (The Swedish Socialist). I immediately wrote for a couple of sample issues, which left the impression that the paper was equally as candid as *Arbetaren* in promoting the cause of socialism. True, it was smaller in format and no real match for *Arbetaren* in terms of journalism. Yet it could not be made the object of critical comparisons in view of the fact that it was edited by a group of volunteers from the Rockford Socialist Club. The columns of *Svenska Socialisten* breathed a type of youthful enthusiasm and fighting spirit, and the paper devoted itself exclusively to socialist propaganda, avoiding the kinds of party disputes that *Arbetaren* so often indulged in.

Upon my return to Port Arthur, I happened to familiarize myself as well with the English-language socialist press. This opportunity came while I was employed as a bricklayer on a construction site, a line of work I had originally taken up after my arrival in North America and had now resumed. One day I found a stack of newspapers that someone had left on a bench, apparently with the intention of putting them in the hands of workers on the site. I took my copy just in the nick of time because a moment later the foreman caught sight of the rest and promptly tore them to bits. Called *Appeal to Reason*, the paper was unassuming in appearance, boasting only four pages of closely set text. At that time I had only a rudimentary knowledge of English, but with the aid of a dictionary I was able to give the paper careful scrutiny. Despite my language difficulties, I understood that the paper was a proponent of socialism, and I soon recognized in its columns the same universal appeal for working-class liberation that I had known earlier through the Swedish socialist press. Because of my limited language skills, however, I decided it would be of no value to become a subscriber at that time, but I saved the address, firmly resolved to return to the paper after further language studies.

The American Socialist Movement

Later on, when I became a subscriber to *Appeal to Reason*, I discovered that despite its diminutive format—or perhaps just for that reason—it had the largest circulation of any socialist paper in America. Over the next few years it increased to a point where the paper was selling between two and three million copies. Printed and published in the little town of Girard, Kansas, it had as its editor and publisher J. A. Wayland, who was not only an avid socialist but an unusually clever businessman. An entire decade before the advent of mass production to American industry, Wayland had already applied the method to his newspaper enterprise, setting the price of an annual subscription as low as twenty-five cents, something that was unheard of in business circles of the day. The newspaper was a weekly, and even though production costs were low at the time, fifty cents would have been considered a cheap subscription price, but Wayland was successful with this experiment. His subscription policy earned the paper a circulation totaling in the millions and for himself a personal fortune. After Wayland's death, the paper was taken over by Fred Warren, who maintained Wayland's policies and pushed the paper's sales into almost every little town in the country. Warren was succeeded by Haldeman-Julius and Louis Kopelin, two young men who for a time had been members of the paper's editorial staff.

The new editors followed in their predecessors' footsteps until several months after the American entrance into World War I. The Socialist Party of America, which was supported by *Appeal to Reason*, was radically opposed to American intervention in the European conflict and, just prior to the declaration of war, had adopted a resolution at its St. Louis convention, calling on its members to do all in their power to prevent armed intervention and to continue their resistance even after war had become inevitable.

Appeal to Reason was a loyal adherent of the party's peace policy during the first months of the war, and because of mass dissatisfaction with the government's declaration of war, the paper's circulation continued to rise. It did not take long, however, for the U.S. Justice Department to become involved in the matter. The result was a surprising blow to the

(Freedom), were published in 1919.[6] *Frihet* was planned to appear periodically, but because of disagreement in the Federation, these plans never materialized. Instead, a special commemorative publication, *Daggryning* (Dawn), was issued in 1920 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the SSF. This was to be the Federation's last literary effort before it changed its name and went the full route by joining the Communist camp. Not until 1925 were efforts revived to strengthen the propaganda campaign with a new publication called *Revelj* (Reveille), published in the spring of that year by the Scandinavian Federation of the Workers' Party.[7] In the fall of 1925, the Federation issued a commemorative publication, *Ljusbringaren* (The Light Bringer), on the twentieth anniversary of *Ny Tid*. It should be explained here that the newspaper dated its pedigree from the first issue of *Svenska Socialisten*. Aside from the usual Communist propaganda pieces, *Ljusbringaren* contained a historical article, "*Ny Tid* genom gamla tider" (New Era Through Old Times), by Daniel Birgers, which provided a compressed history of the Federation press up to 1925.[8]

Several issues of *Revelj* were published in 1926, but after that the task of publishing *Ny Tid* appears to have been far too time-consuming to allow for sideline occupations. In 1929, when the Federation felt strong enough to continue its magazine campaign and began publication of *Allarm*, it was evident that the Swedish-American Communist propaganda machine stood at its zenith.[9] The first issue of *Allarm* mirrored this situation in altogether explicit terms. On the cover was a silhouette of Lenin facing a rising sun, with its rays projecting against a bloodred sky, and behind the silhouette was a colonnade of red flags. The hammer and sickle completed this compelling imagery of red, which provided such a striking reflection of the actual magazine content. Later issues of *Allarm*, for example, those issued in 1936–37, have nothing comparable to the glaring Soviet idolization of the inaugural issue. The same was true of the last issue of *Allarm*, which appeared at Christmas, 1939.

During the years of the Great Depression, the Communists found ample opportunity to propagate their ideas. The Swedish federation was relatively strong at the time because of considerable membership gains from the major immigration waves of the 1920s, the last such influx before the quota laws went into effect.[10] Drawing on these new recruits, the Swedish-American Communists took every advantage of the situation. It was not easy for them, as a foreign-language federation, to assume direct responsibility for the organization of unemployment committees and related measures, but they were able to influence individual members and encourage their involvement on the scene. In Rockford, Illinois, for example, they made life difficult for Mayor Herman Hallstrom, who spared no pains to

alleviate the crisis but could never do enough to satisfy the Communists. City Hall became the target of hunger demonstrations, and the city council was harassed in every conceivable way. Hallstrom himself was a product of Rockford's socialist movement and was not easily perturbed. He understood only too well that the Communists were not simply concerned about the welfare of the unemployed but were equally anxious to market their political ideology. After listening to their demands, Hallstrom acted on his best judgment and generally succeeded in solving the problem of the unemployed in a satisfactory manner.

own newspaper, and on July 21, 1920, the first issue of *Folket* (The People) rolled off the presses in Brooklyn, New York.[1]

Lyzell assumed the editorship of *Folket*, and despite the schism and other related disputes, he kept the paper in line with Socialist Labor Party doctrine. His death on November 24, 1921, however, was a severe blow to the new organization and its paper, and it apparently contributed to their estrangement from the mother party. Lyzell's successor was Charles Fredzen, one of the most active members of the Federation. He was ably assisted by Federation secretary C. J. Björklund, who had previously been a prime supporter of *Arbetaren*.[2]

That very same year negotiations were launched with the Scandinavian Socialist Federation (SSF) on a possible merger of the two organizations and their newspapers. Progress in this direction was stalled for some time, as forces within the SSF were advocating collaboration with a new Communist-inspired faction called the Workers' Party. This party claimed to be the legitimate Communist organization, since both the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party had elected to go underground in the wake of the federal government's systematic persecution of Communist propaganda activities. The majority of the SSF members favored association with the new party, while the opposite was true among members of the Socialist Labor Party faction. Eventually, however, even the latter organization went on record as supporting the Third International, recognizing in effect that it was based on Socialist Labor Party doctrine. This development revitalized the idea of merger and stimulated the negotiations.

In the first referendum, the measure failed by a vote of 190 to 164, but after renewed canvassing, a second referendum was held, and the measure won by a wide margin. There are no vote totals from the second referendum, but judging from the results of the first round, it can be said that voter turnout was not even half as strong as when the SSF went to the polls two years earlier on the issue of an independent organization. These figures make one thing unmistakably clear: it was wishful thinking, and nothing else, that lay behind the claims of the Communist element in the SSF in 1920 that a more leftist profile would win scores of new members for the Federation.

The official merger of the two organizations took place at a joint convention held in Chicago in February 1922. This convention also decided the fate of the two newspapers, *Facklan* and *Folket*, which were now to be published under the name *Ny Tid* (New Era), the first issue of which appeared on March 10, 1922. Oscar W. Larson was appointed editor, but on July 23, 1922, he was replaced by Charles Fredzen, who for a

few months acted both as editor and Federation secretary.[3] Larson returned as editor, however, at a later date, staying on until December 9, 1923, when he resigned and left the city of Chicago.

Larson's successor as editor of *Ny Tid* was a young man by the name of Daniel Birgers, who had been an occasional contributor to *Svenska Socialisten* and harbored the ambition of becoming a working-class journalist.[4] Although he achieved his ambition, his tenure was short-lived. A new star eventually emerged in the Swedish-American Communist firmament, namely, the Swedish-speaking Finn, Allan Wallenius, or, as he was known in America, Ellis Peterson.[5]

Peterson was young, well educated, and a full-blooded Communist. Though fresh off the boat, he had resided in the United States some years previously, at which time he belonged to the Swedish-language section of the Socialist Labor Party. In the columns of *Arbetaren* and in the Christmas annual, *Landkänning*, he had frequently expressed his admiration for De Leon's leadership and his interpretation of Marxist teachings, but once he had studied Leninist doctrine at close range, Peterson repudiated the SLP and showered it with criticism. In Chicago the Scandinavian Federation welcomed him with open arms, and it was not long before Birgers elected to resign as editor in favor of Peterson. This personnel shift took place in the summer of 1925, signaling the start of an intensified Communist propaganda campaign in the columns of *Ny Tid* and encouraging subscription sales of the newspaper. *Ny Tid* was expanded from a four-page to a six-page edition; in 1929 it was increased to eight pages. An occasional publication called *Allarm* also made its appearance in 1929. This was a strident Communist magazine that managed a harmonious blend of articles with pro-Soviet and antireligious content.

The Communist era of the Swedish-American labor movement was not alone, however, in producing occasional publications of this nature. In 1915, for example, a commemorative album was issued on the tenth anniversary of *Svenska Socialisten*, and it was the first of the few historical works dealing with the Swedish-American labor movement. Between 1917 and 1919, *Folkkalendern* (The People's Calendar/Almanac) appeared on an annual basis, with contents alternating between historical reports on the labor movement and various types of propaganda pieces. The first issue, for example, contained an excellent account of the Socialist Party's foreign-language federations: eleven in number, these federations had a total membership of 28,100 or roughly one-fourth of the party membership at that time.

A "May Day" publication and a Christmas magazine, both called *Frihet*

newspaper. Gustaf Larson succeeded Christensen as Federation secretary, a post that took on an entirely different flavor after the break with the Socialist Party. Prior to that time, the Socialist Party had paid the salary of the Federation secretary in return for a fee from the Federation, a sum that in no way ever matched the costs of operating the Federation office. Now, however, the organization was on its own in securing these funds, and the new secretary soon found this a thankless task. Gustaf Larson was, I should point out, hardly suited as an organizer and administrator for that type of organization. His real passion was books: philosophy and literature held far more interest for him than political activism. He soon tired of his responsibilities and withdrew from all active involvement with the Federation.

Gustaf Larson was best known in the SSF for his newspaper articles, written under the pseudonym of Lucidor. Good-natured satire and sparkling humor were the hallmarks of his journalism, most of which dealt with conditions and situations in the Federation and frequently poked fun at leading figures in the various clubs as well as the Federation executive. Lucidor's barbs probably stung their targets but also left them smiling, which made it easier for them to swallow their medicine. Larson was also known and respected among readers of *Svenska Socialisten* for articles on purely literary topics. A lecture he once gave on Jack London and later had published in the paper can justifiably be called a masterpiece, both for its form and its content. The article was reprinted by a number of newspapers in Sweden. It was without a doubt one of the most illuminating studies of Jack London and his works ever published in the Swedish language. Few people have interpreted the gist of London with as much understanding as this self-taught Swedish-American worker.

33

Under the Russian Colors

With Oscar W. Larson as editor, *Svenska Socialisten* lost no time in rallying around the Russian colors. Although the split in the Communist movement did present problems, Larson faithfully followed the Federation's decision to work for the Third International without favoring any of the warring parties. On the other hand, he did everything he could to emphasize the Federation's break with the Socialist Party. As a means of wiping the slate clean, he engineered a decision through the Federation executive that renamed the newspaper *Facklan* (The Torch). That, in effect, could be regarded as the final liquidation of the old socialist movement.

Strangely enough, Larson did not last long as editor of *Facklan*. Despite all of the qualifications that seemed to guarantee him a long tenure, Larson gave up after several years at the helm. A stomach ailment he incurred during his days as a travel-worn activist doubtlessly contributed to his longing for a slower pace of things back home in Salt Lake City. Larson eventually returned to the Mormon capital after completing his work in Chicago. He remained loyal to his political ideas but gradually became involved in the English-speaking branch of the movement.

It was fairly understandable that the SSF, with its unlimited freedom of thought and expression, would fall victim to the ideological splits in the international labor movement after World War I. When the Swedish-language section of the Socialist Labor Party also fell prey to these divisive tendencies, however, the news could only arouse general consternation. As an organization, the Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation had always been a staunch follower of the party line, and the primary demand it placed on its members was their blind acceptance of Daniel De Leon's brand of socialism. Every member received a grueling education in De Leonism, and anyone who doubted the soul-saving powers of this omnipotent faith was declared anathema. Despite these measures, a bitter feud erupted in the SSLF during 1919, and after the war of words had inflamed the columns of the newspaper *Arbetaren* for a considerable length of time, the Federation split in two, with both parts laying claim to the organizational title. One of these factions, led by A. H. Lyzell, editor in chief of *Arbetaren*, was not recognized by the "mother" party and also lost control over the Federation newspaper. Although they had less than half of the membership in their fold, the outcasts felt strong enough to start their

the types contained in the minority report. Bengston strongly opposed any restrictions on the Federation's participation in socialist election campaigns, and he pointed out that the programs of such parties as the Socialist Left in Sweden gave prominence to the demand for reforms that would benefit the working class.[3] Bengston recommended the rejection of the IWW endorsement and defended the majority proposal's call for support of the idea of "One Big Union." He believed that the majority report was the only basis for an effective Federation.

[Olof] Starblom, Massachusetts, could not endorse old-fashioned social democracy. Our times demand new methods, he said, and the Third International shows us the way.

[Sven] Jacobson, Chicago, rejected both proposals and submitted an alternative, which did not win support. [Niels] Kjaer, Chicago, called for approval of the Third International, saying that a statement in that direction constituted a program in and of itself.

Oscar W. Larson believed both proposals were expressions of deep conviction. He said that he was personally acquainted with Federation members all across the country and that he was personally convinced that the minority report spoke their will. Up to now, he said, the Federation's position had been weak and sentimental, and it was time to give it more focus. Larson deemed it essential to define the Federation's objective, and he repudiated criticism of the minority report on that account.

[E. O.] Wistrand, Minneapolis, declared his support for the majority report, saying that a declaration of principle would maximize the Federation's ability to act.[4] Wistrand's opinions were shared by [Amos] Erickson, Chicago.

[G. L.] Larson, Chicago, did not believe that the minority report was as dangerous as it looked. Clear policy lines demand a declaration in favor of the Third International, he said. Though unsure of the advisability of supporting the IWW, Larson was otherwise largely sympathetic with the radical wing. [August] Rosquist, Pocatello, made a similar statement in this regard.[5]

[Eric] Erickson, Worcester, said that a reformist program was tantamount to ideological compromise. In his opinion, Sweden and Germany were examples of reformist socialist republics.

[Carl W.] Flodin, Jamestown, along with [Jos.] Oswall and [Albert] Gustafson, Rockford, called for approval of the minority report.

Their views were echoed by Federation secretary Christensen, who rejected the majority report as being meaningless. We must organize ourselves in line with the demands of social development, he said. Christensen proposed changes in the minority report, including elimination of the support statement on behalf of the IWW.

[L.] Sandgren, Superior, had no faith in revolutionary slogans, which, he said, would scare away half of the Federation membership.

Oscar W. Larson took the floor once again to point out the dangers of the majority report, which left room for the reformist policies of the Socialist Party. Following his remarks, the convention agreed to approve the minority report in principle but referred it to committee for adoption of several minor changes, including elimination of the resolution on religion. Once these changes were incorporated, the convention approved the report almost unanimously. Bengston was the only delegate to oppose its acceptance.

Oscar W. Larson was elected editor of *Svenska Socialisten*, after the application of a staff member from a bourgeois newspaper was rejected. Since N. Juel Christensen would not accept immediate election but requested time for consideration, he was recommended to the post of business manager after Henry Bengston, who had resigned at the last meeting of the executive committee. That committee was empowered to carry out the election.

The convention also decided to continue publication of *Svenska Socialisten* and *Socialdemokraten* without change. In order to cover financial losses, the convention approved the sale of $5,000 worth of shares in the Scandinavian Workers' Publishing Society. It also issued an appeal to the Federation clubs to organize benefit activities on behalf of the newspapers.

At 9:00 A.M., Sunday, the convention reconvened to hear the various committee reports. First on the agenda was the platform and policy committee, which announced that it had failed to reach unanimity and produced a majority report, signed by Henry Bengston, Carl Haglund, and E. O. Wistrand, as well as a minority report, signed by Oscar W. Larson and Max Everhart [Arne Swabeck].[2]

Based on a proposal drafted by Bengston, the majority report defined the Federation program as "working for the complete elimination of capitalist society and its replacement with a socialist republic based on scientific socialism." The report went on to propose that the Federation actively participate in the class struggle on both the political and economic fronts; that it both endorse and promote the idea of "One Big Union"; and that it work for the greatest number of immediate improvements in conditions for the working class.

The original draft of this proposal called for cooperation with the Socialist Party, but Bengston eliminated this point once he realized the futility of winning its passage.

The minority report characterized the Federation's purpose as "establishing and maintaining a strong organization among Scandinavian Americans to promote greater solidarity in propagating the socialist cause." It also defined the positions of the two social classes —workers and employers—and maintained that international capitalism had shown itself incapable of responding to social needs and now stood on the brink of collapse.

The Federation's program should therefore include propaganda and education as weapons in the cause of class solidarity, the necessary prerequisite for the elimination of the capitalist system.

The minority report insisted on revolutionary class struggle as a means to this end and called upon the Federation membership to enhance the power of the laboring class through mass participation in fighting organizations across the country. As a final point, the report declared its support of the Third International.

Along with its declaration of principles, the committee minority released its proposed resolutions on issues of parliamentarianism, industrial unionism, and religion.

The first resolution maintained that social progress had demostrated the singular effectiveness of nonparliamentary actions as weapons in the class struggle. Consequently, the Federation convention should seek to counteract popular credence in the parliamentary system and block support by the Federation to any political campaign.

The resolution on industrial unionism emphasized the necessity of basing "One Big Union" squarely on the class struggle principle, and it declared the IWW to be the vehicle for that idea. The hope was also expressed that the IWW would take the initiative in unifying all American workers around one militant, economic organization.

The final resolution called for resistance to all organized religions, which had been shown to be the strongest pillars of the capitalist system.

The subsequent debate was launched by Max Everhart, editor of *Socialdemokraten*, who considered the two platform proposals to be so diametrically contradictory as to exclude any talk of compromise. He criticized the majority proposal's call for the creation of a republic based on scientific socialism, pointing out that it was not explicit enough and left room for misinterpretation. The minority report, he said, contained the appropriate safeguards by providing a clearer enunciation of ultimate objectives. He also endorsed full support of the Third International, without which the Federation was doomed. Everhart closed his remarks by saying that the minority report should be given unanimous approval and that he could not accept any changes in that report except stylistic ones.

Bengston cautioned delegates about falling prey to spiraling radicalism, a trend that he said dominated the majority of the Federation and threatened to paralyze free and independent decision making. In his opinion, the majority plank on the creation of a socialist republic did not require any lengthy, poorly conceived definitions of

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Party Convention and a Change of Course

The Scandinavian Socialist Federation held its third convention at the Karl Marx Club's meeting hall (Folkets Hus) in Chicago on September 6–8, 1920. Delegates had arrived from most of the member clubs, except for those on the West Coast, which refrained from sending representatives because of the long distance and related travel costs. Thorough preparations had been made in advance, particularly with regard to political platforms. The radicals had developed policy planks that conformed to the program of the Third International but did not call for adherence to any of the existing Communist parties. Their ideal for the moment was a politically independent federation that had its heart in the Third International.

The reformist faction demanded a return to the Socialist Party, while also expressing support for the concept of industrial trade unionism, but no thought was given to expressions of support for the syndicalists of the IWW. The reformists also gave heavy endorsement to the Socialist Party's election campaign and its presidential candidate, Eugene Debs, then in the Atlanta Penitentiary. The primary reason for this endorsement was Debs's unique contributions to both the labor and the peace movements, which made him the obvious candidate of the leftist parties. It was also explained that an overwhelming vote for Debs would, under the circumstances, be the singularly most effective way for the American worker to protest the rapidly rising postwar reaction.

The pro-Russian delegates took their seats on the opening day of the convention with a sense of absolute victory, and they had every reason to believe so. On their side stood the entire Norwegian-Danish delegation, led by SSF secretary N. Juel Christensen, the editor of *Socialdemokraten*, Arne Swabeck, and Niels Kjaer, all of whom ranked unquestionably among the Federation's brightest forces. As for the Swedes, Oscar W. Larson was confident and secure in the thought of being able to deliver the decisive votes at the crucial moment, thereby saving the Federation for Lenin and Trotsky.

For those of us on the Social Democratic side, the picture was clear. We realized that our position was untenable, but in my estimation, at least, it challenged our determination to fight to the bitter end. Compared to the

opposition, we were only a handful of delegates on the convention floor, but we had a considerable following across the country that we were not about to abandon. One of them was the former Swedish Covenant Church pastor, C. G. Ellström, known for his expertise as a speaker for our cause. In a letter to *Svenska Socialisten*, Ellström wrote that East Coast supporters of the reformist platform were encouraged to hear that there was a group of comrades in Chicago who still rallied around the Socialist Party. We knew that we had supporters in other parts of the country, even though they were too few in number to elect delegates to the convention. That fact increased our sense of responsibility. We represented not only our own local clubs but also the reformist members of the Federation all across the country.

That, in short, was the political alignment on the opening day of this pivotal convention in the history of the SSF. Two ideologies stood poised for battle, and as the following newspaper account suggests, the fighting was hot and heavy. The September 10, 1920, issue of *Svenska Socialisten* carried this convention report:[1]

> As expected, the Federation convention was a field day for the steamrolling radicals. The reformist wing, led by Bengston, was so soundly defeated that in the end Bengston found himself practically alone. Even the two members of the platform draft committee who endorsed Bengston's proposal deserted during the convention debate and voted for the radicals' motion.
>
> By accepting this program, the convention acknowledged the Federation's approval of the Third International, endorsed the IWW, and rejected all efforts at cooperation with the Socialist Party or involvement in any reformist activity.
>
> Held at Folkets Hus in Chicago, the convention opened at 8:45 last Friday evening with a few words of greeting from Federation secretary Christensen, who welcomed the delegates and pointed out that the convention would be of decisive importance for the Federation. What the convention decided would also be the fate of the Federation. Christensen extended a special welcome to comrade Claus Nicoll who, aside from Christensen, was the only delegate present who had attended the Federation's first and constitutive convention on July 4, 1911.
>
> Friday evening and Saturday morning were devoted primarily to delegate selection to necessary committees, and on Saturday afternoon the convention adjourned in order to allow for committee work.

said. We had no contact whatsoever with the various Communist parties, and even if we had ever accepted a printing order from a pro-Communist customer, we were still within our full legal rights. Moreover, we had never considered it our duty to screen our customers' political leanings before doing business with them.

After several hours of interrogation, they took me back to the newspaper office, where a new search was conducted. As nothing new was discovered, we returned to the police station for further questioning. This time the chief of detectives was handling matters, and he informed me that while I was away Swenson had confessed and that it was no use for me to continue my denials. I replied that what I had said was the truth and that I had nothing to add. I knew that as long as they had not coerced Swenson into confessing what was obviously a falsehood, our separate testimonies would concur.

By now Johnson had had enough of the charade, and he took the chief of detectives to task. He pointed out that nothing of a criminal nature had transpired and that the police had no right to keep us in custody. The chief of detectives finally gave way on this point, but because Swenson was not an American citizen, he was going to exercise his right to send Swenson to the immigration authorities for further investigation. I was free to go, however, and after the lawyer and I had put a square meal behind us, I returned to the newspaper office and waited anxiously for the printers to arrive. Several hours later, Swenson himself appeared, exhausted and embittered by the unwarranted display of force at the hands of the police. "I've never seen a more brutal and more idiotic bunch of bloodhounds," he exclaimed, and I heartily agreed with him at that.

By this time Swenson had grown tired of all the fuss and bother of the newspaper business. The rather constant stream of criticism from readers of *Svenska Socialisten* had made him bitter and resentful, but what he failed to realize was that most of this was his own fault. At first, he had taken delight in lashing out at club members across the country who did not share his views, but he lost control when they returned the favor and served him frequent reprimands on his editing of the newspaper. His mood changed to anger, and many times he launched personal assaults on his adversaries. This was destructive in the long run, and as a result, he lost interest in his work. When Swenson had his confrontation with the Chicago police, his mind was made up, and he tendered his resignation. Having both his readers and the police against him was more than he could bear.

The August 20, 1920, issue of *Svenska Socialisten* carried Swenson's editorial "The Last Word," which he wrote in a fit of rage, mercilessly blasting his opponents and exalting his friends as the real backbone of the movement. In terms of sheer vehemence and recklessness, this article surpassed anything that had been said in the protracted polemic between Swenson and his readers. But I let him have his way. The last word was his, despite its lack of diplomacy and understanding among friends.

Immediately thereafter, Swenson left for Sweden, and sometime later we heard that he had joined the staff of *Dalarnes Folkblad* (Borlänge), a Swedish Communist newspaper. His career there was short-lived, however, and ended in tragedy. A year or so after his return, it was reported that he was suffering from mental illness and that he had been admitted to an institution, where he later died.

In many respects Nils Swenson was a gifted young man, but the news of his demise explained a good deal of his hidden problems. His intolerant attitude toward and dispirited relations with colleagues were evidently due to a mental imbalance over which he finally lost control. Yet he remained faithful to the labor movement from his early youth until the very last. Those of us who have often cast judgment on Swenson's actions have every reason to revise our final opinion of him: "Thou hast not considered the burden destiny laid upon his shoulders."

At Swenson's departure, I reassumed the editorial responsibilities with *Svenska Socialisten*, a task I had nearly been relieved of over a three-year period. During that time Swenson had functioned as editor, while I took care of the business side of the newspaper and printing office. The new order of things was only temporary. As I had rebelled against the Federation majority, it was unthinkable for me to stay on as editor, and for the Federation, it was equally important that *Svenska Socialisten* be edited by someone who was loyal to the party line.

Svenska Socialisten was not the only problem awaiting solution by the Federation. Because of its endorsement of the Third International and its definite opposition to the main party program, the SSF had been ousted from the Socialist Party, a fate that was shared by most of the party's foreign-language federations, for the same reasons. It was obvious that the Federation had to decide where it would head in the future, if it were to continue operations at all. As a step in that direction, the Federation decided to hold a convention and invite all of its member clubs to send representatives.

the summer heat.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and since the workday was over, the plates were left where they were. As things turned out, this was a small stroke of fortune. Shortly after the plates were delivered and our office staff was still engaged in conversation with a handful of party associates, the office door opened and three men came in. They introduced themselves as police officers and asked if a Communist newspaper was being printed on the premises. "No," I replied, "our two newspapers have no relations with the Communist Party, but feel free to look around, for we have no secrets to hide." The three men did just that, rummaging about in the editorial office before setting foot in the pressroom. Although I was convinced we had done nothing illegal by typesetting Ferguson's newspaper, my heart leapt in my throat when the officers began to make their way through the stacks of type and rows of typesetting machines. Nothing escaped their minute inspection, nothing except for one little corner. None of them had thought of looking behind the open office door, where the Communist types were piled against the wall as full convicting evidence.

Somewhat crestfallen, the detectives returned to our office, but apparently they had no intention of returning to headquarters empty-handed. Turning to Nils Swenson, they told him to accompany them to the police station, but they never bothered to explain why they elected to arrest him in particular.

As soon as these uninvited guests had departed, we made a clean sweep of the pressroom and editorial office. We began by carrying the guilt-ridden Communist typefaces down to the basement, then turned our attention to the two newspaper offices. Extensive runs of *Svenska Socialisten* and *Socialdemokraten* published since the outbreak of World War I, along with correspondence, reports, and scores of priceless historical documents were consigned to a hole we had dug in one corner of the basement. What prompted these safety precautions was not our fear of legal action, as we were convinced that we had followed every statute and ordinance on the books. What did concern us was the eventuality of the police making another raid on our offices, confiscating our historical documents and, once nothing incriminating had been found, either destroying the material or returning it in disheveled condition.

Our safety precautions were to no avail. Not that the long arm of the law detected our hidden cache; rather, the misfortune that struck us was of an entirely unexpected sort. Before we dared retrieve anything, a torrential downpour caused the basement to flood, totally destroying both printed matter and documents. In effect, many interesting chapters in the history of

the Scandinavian-American labor movement are unwritten today because of this quirk of Mother Nature.

Once we had completed our operations in the pressroom, we went right to work on securing legal assistance for the jailed Nils Swenson. We made a telephone call first to the prominent lawyer Seymour Stedman, one of the Socialist Party elite, but as he was preoccupied at the moment, he put us in touch with a younger colleague, a Swedish lawyer named Swan M. Johnson, who promised to take care of the matter.[4] Johnson spent the next day, a Sunday, in futile attempts to persuade the police to disclose Swenson's whereabouts. Not until Monday morning did he have any success, and that only after dozens of calls to different police stations in the city of Chicago. Swenson was located in the custody of the so-called anarchist patrol, a leftover from the Haymarket Square riot of the 1880s. It was to this slightly updated relic from a dark chapter in labor movement history that Swan Johnson and I now turned our steps.

The patrol held sway over a couple of rooms in City Hall, where a half dozen detectives scurried about like chickens in a coop. A uniformed doorman allowed us to enter without complications, and I had hardly cleared the threshold when one of our uninvited guests from the previous Saturday came up to me and in mocking tones paid me a compliment for having spared him the trouble of having to bring me downtown. Nils Swenson sat surrounded by detectives but rose to his feet as soon as he saw me come in. He had hardly taken a step when one of his interrogators struck him across the chest, causing him to fall backwards.

It was obvious that Swenson had spent anything but a pleasant weekend. Normally he gave the appearance of a true gentleman, well dressed and well groomed, but there he sat, an unshaven and rumpled figure, exhausted by hours of cross-examination and embittered at having been treated as a criminal by a bunch of heavy-handed and disrespectful detectives. He had been locked up in one of the filthiest police stations in the city, with nothing more than a plank to sleep on. Under the United States Constitution, a person is innocent as charged until proven guilty, but how it is possible for a defendant to be treated as a criminal from the very day of his arrest is a contradiction the lawmakers will have to answer for.

I was next in line. A half dozen detectives circled around me, asking all sorts of questions in an attempt to produce a statement to the effect that our organization cooperated with the Communists and that our newspapers acted as their spokesmen. I told them that even if that were the case, it was not a police matter, because the Communist movement had never been declared illegal in America. The actual facts of the matter were otherwise, I

Party and the reformist line?"

When I assured him that he was not mistaken, he expressed his sincere regret at the fact. Swabeck had just returned from a district meeting on the West Coast, where representatives of the Seattle and Portland clubs had threatened to boycott *Svenska Socialisten* because of a bitter exchange with Nils Swenson, and Swabeck himself had anything but good words to say about the same gentleman. Having thrown his full support to the West Coast clubs in that dispute, Swabeck found it embarrassing to be making common cause with his antagonist in the ideological battle that now seemed inevitable within the Federation.

Oscar Larson, who also attended the same district meeting and who had never gotten along with Swenson, shared Swabeck's bitter disappointment over my position on the issues. He and I had worked admirably together for quite some time. We first became acquainted through an exchange of correspondence while Larson was still residing in Salt Lake City, and this led initially to a warm personal friendship. That we did not always agree on political issues seemed natural to us, and it only served to enrich our exchange of ideas and broaden our perspectives. But Larson was really taken aback by my refusal to accept the new line of action from Russia, and he never deviated from his own standpoint during the course of our long and fruitless debates.

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Party Schism and the Red Raids

The repercussions of the Russian Revolution on the international labor movement were also keenly felt by the Socialist Party in America.[1] After a long and bitterly fought struggle, the pro-Communist element withdrew to form the Communist Party, but there was so much confusion at the time among the extremists that unanimity could not be reached. Soon another faction, the Communist Labor Party, emerged on the scene and made its own overtures to deserters of the Socialist Party. The confusion worsened later on, leading to the establishment of a third pro-Communist faction, the Workers' Party. Of these three, only the Communist Party managed to hold its ground. The other two fought the good fight but in the end were forced to surrender.

As a matter of course, all three parties launched intensive propaganda campaigns, part of which was waged through the columns of party-line newspapers. The first of these, *The Communist*, was introduced as the organ of the Communist Party.[2] Police officials were quick to inform themselves about this development because, even if a Communist paper strictly observed the letter of the law, an ounce of prevention was regarded as better than a pound of cure. They were well aware that the ultra-red activists could not expect much sympathy in a court of law if they tried to seek legal redress.

The police first used scare tactics against the printers of the Communist newspaper, causing the publishers to move through a succession of printing establishments. As the police failed to alert the printers in advance, the newspaper always managed to escape detection. Before long, however, the printing offices of *Svenska Socialisten* were also dragged into this "witch-hunt." One day a lawyer named Ferguson entered our office and asked us to print something for him.[3] The man was only a fleeting acquaintance of mine, but I knew that he had belonged to the extreme wing of the Socialist Party. I did not know whether or not he had joined any of the Communist factions. Under the circumstances, however, I felt I had no right to refuse his request, particularly as I did not know the extent of the Communist witch-hunt. In any event, we set up the newspaper as he had ordered, but because our press was too small to print it, he took the plates over to the printers of the German newspaper *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*. The next day the plates were returned to us, and upon delivery, they were stacked on the floor outside the office door, which had been left wide open because of

society Larson himself espoused.

Larson's arrival in Chicago came at the initiative of the Federation executive. There was always a need for new propaganda ventures among the major Swedish communities in the Midwest, and Larson had demonstrated his competence in this regard during his travels out west. He was also comparatively successful as a party organizer in Chicago and outlying areas. In 1920, when *Svenska Socialisten* was preparing to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, Larson was also assigned the task of editing a special commemorative publication in honor of the occasion.[6] For my own part, I had a few misgivings about the project because it was my responsibility to secure the necessary funds, but I really wanted Larson to complete it. Besides, over a ten-year period I had learned to solve seemingly insoluble financial problems. At any rate, Larson eventually released his publication, with the Communist emblem emblazoned on the cover and a typically Bolshevik-oriented content inside. But it was an expensive project at that, and there were many who wondered why publication costs were so high. Similar publications, such as *Folkkalendern* (The People's Calendar) and the magazine *Frihet* (Freedom), had been published earlier under the auspices of the SSF secretary and the newspaper staff without incurring extra editorial costs. There were never any serious charges lodged against Larson, partly because his cordial and warm-hearted personality seemed to disarm potential adversaries and partly because he represented the burgeoning Communist viewpoint within the Federation, which at that time had won a clear majority.

Larson's anniversary publication, entitled *Daggryning* (Dawn), appeared in the autumn of 1920. Prior to that, the Federation had undergone a change of direction, which transformed it from a section of the Socialist Party—the largest influential socialist or, if you will, social democratic party in the nation— to a politically independent organization that sought its ideological footings in the Bolshevik Third International.

The march toward Communism had begun right after the Russian October Revolution. At first, there was not a soul in the Federation who did not have sympathies with the Russian struggle for liberation and did not have hopes for its success. But once there were obvious signs of oligarchy and dictatorship, many of us began to doubt the infallibility of the new regime. The majority, however, followed the Bolshevik line without reservation, and for several reasons. Throughout its existence, the SSF had operated as a propaganda organization that only in exceptional cases needed to shoulder any social responsibility. Its membership consisted of young people, who were therefore easily influenced by extremist ideologies from both the Swedish and the German working-class movements. When the latter joined forces with Bolshevism, the majority of the SSF membership quite naturally followed suit. Things went so far that individual club members across the country became fanatically afraid that they would not be considered radical enough.

Bolshevism Wins Territory

But there was another wing of the SSF. Nearly twenty-five years of history as a branch of the Socialist Party had left its mark, if not on the SSF as a whole, then at least on a substantial number of its members.[7] I myself belonged to this group, and because of my status as business manager for the newspaper and a member of the editorial staff, I could not avoid taking a leading position in the circle of the party faithful. We considered ourselves first and foremost members of the Socialist Party, the nation's leading workers' party, and could not entertain the thought of deserting that party simply because a revolutionary change of government had occurred in another part of the world. We thought it best to wait at least until the new Russia had been given the chance to show its true colors. Moreover, the Socialist Party had always been sympathetic toward the Russian Revolution, even though it reserved the right to dictate its own destiny. The markedly democratic principles of the Socialist Party were far more to our liking than the Bolshevik dictatorship, commandeered as it already appeared to be by a handful of strong-willed personalities.

Fortunately, the differences of opinion expressed within the Federation did not produce any personal animosities between the followers of both camps. On the editorial staff of *Svenska Socialisten*, I was the only one who remained faithful to the Socialist Party. At first, my position aroused both surprise and disappointment, for up to that point my loyalty to the Federation had never been questioned, and no one had challenged my editorial handling of the newspaper. Nils Swenson's name was most closely associated with the editorship during the two years following the Russian Revolution, and although he was almost always at odds with different factions in the SSF, these disputes centered essentially on personalities and never on matters of principle. When it was rumored among club members that the editorial staff of *Svenska Socialisten* was not solidly behind the Russian Bolshevik line, people seemed to take it for granted that the guilty party was the pugnacious Swenson. They found it hard to believe that it was I who refused to follow the extremist majority.

When Arne Swabeck, for example, arrived in Chicago from the West Coast in the early summer of 1920 and heard word of the situation in the Federation leadership, he came into my office and blurted out his concern.

"Is it really true that it's you and not Swenson who favors the Socialist

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Bolshevism Wins Territory

There were no indications at that time that the SSF was leaning in the direction of the conservative camp. On the contrary, the Federation had always maintained that it belonged squarely with the leftist wing of the socialist movement, and the Bolshevik revolution in Russia only intensified this political coloring. It was considered both counterrevolutionary and unworthy of membership in the Federation to criticize any phase of the Russian Revolution.

Among members of the Norwegian-Danish Karl Marx Club, Russian Communism gained two young and gifted spokesmen in Niels Kjaer and Arne Swabeck, both Danish-born.[1] A carpenter by trade, Niels Kjaer initially chose the trade union movement as his sphere of activity, and before long he occupied a leading position in the Trade Union Educational League, one of the earliest Communist beachheads in that movement.[2] His propaganda activities soon put him at odds with conservative trade unionists, and when the "Red raids" began during the early 1920s, the federal government intervened and issued a deportation order for Kjaer. Arne Swabeck, meanwhile, remained on the political scene, taking an active part in the various Communist parties. Later on, he became an ardent Trotskyite, effectively isolating himself from the majority of the Scandinavian Communist sympathizers, who remained loyal to the Stalinist line.

Oscar W. Larson, of Salt Lake City, Utah, was the most ardent and capable leader of the Swedish Communist sympathizers.[3] Born in Uppsala, Sweden, Larson had once been a member of the Young Socialist movement. After immigrating to America, he settled in the Mormon capital, where he joined the local club of the Scandinavian Socialist Federation (SSF). He would doubtlessly have preferred membership in a nonpartisan socialist club, but as there was none in the area, he joined ranks with the SSF. Larson lost little time in becoming active, and with his help, the Salt Lake City club developed into a leading center of socialist propaganda. Among other things, it spearheaded the Swedish campaign on behalf of Joe Hill, and club members did everything in their power to alleviate prison conditions for the condemned worker-poet.

Larson soon became a regular correspondent and an energetic subscription agent for *Svenska Socialisten*. His contacts with the Chicago office, however, held a magnetic attraction for him, and as time went by, his desire to be at the center of things only increased his dissatisfaction with

his location on the periphery. These feelings were relieved at first by his involvement in propaganda tours to neighboring states, which gave him an opportunity to show his skills. On one of these missions he visited the town of Pocatello, Idaho, and several West Coast cities, where he revitalized the programs of existing local clubs.

In Pocatello, Larson met with Erland Blomquist, another West Coast supporter of *Svenska Socialisten* and the SSF.[4] Erland, or Allen, as he called himself in the States, was employed by the railroad yards in Pocatello and had come in contact with a group of young Swedes who listened in fascination to their "Red" comrade's talk of international socialism. Through Blomquist's contacts in Pocatello, *Svenska Socialisten* acquired a substantial number of new subscribers, followed by the formation of a Swedish socialist club under the auspices of the SSF. Blomquist was blacklisted during a strike at the Union Pacific Railroad yards and was unable to find work after the strike failed. As he, too, shared strong ties with the Federation headquarters, he left the Pocatello area for Chicago and joined the local Englewood club, where his contagious enthusiasm was put to work on propaganda activities.

Blomquist stayed in Chicago for several years, long enough for him to find a wife, but, as so often happens to anyone who has ever resided in any of the idyllic towns out west, the big city could not retain its hold on him. The American people have always been drawn by the lure of the western United States, and the Swedish immigrants were no exception. Allen returned to Pocatello, found employment in a school as a maintenance man, and rejoined the local socialist club. Unfortunately, he died at a relatively young age, which was a great loss not only for his own club but for the SSF as a whole. A native of northern Sweden, Allen had been schooled in the Swedish working-class movement, and he was the type of person who essentially advanced our cause out in the rural areas.

Oscar W. Larson had been a longtime contributor to *Svenska Socialisten* before his arrival in Chicago. Some of his articles were also published in book form by the SSF under the title *I främlingsland* (In a Land of Strangers).[5] The book contained a number of sensitively written sketches and stories of immigrant life in America, including an account of the last hours of the worker-poet Joe Hill. Larson was both a dedicated idealist and a sensitive human being, and it was only natural that he would feel all the more estranged by the crass realities of immigrant life in an American city. For this reason his book took the form of a bitter complaint over the feelings of estrangement felt by new arrivals to this country, but at the same time it voiced a defiant appeal for his readers to create the type of

continue our activities once war had been declared?

One thing was perfectly clear to us. Our duty as socialists and citizens had taken on new dimensions in the twinkling of an eye. Up to that point, our propaganda efforts had played a subordinate role in our immediate surroundings. We had never gone beyond our own countrymen, except during elections or major campaigns, when we assisted the SP with nationwide propaganda efforts. Now, however, our antiwar declaration put us in a position where we might be encouraging our members to commit acts that could have fateful consequences, both for themselves and for their associates. Where were we to draw the line between our rights as advocates of peace and our duty as citizens? That was a difficult question to answer, and most of us left its resolution to the future. Our immediate task was to call for unity on the peace issue, as long as there remained the slightest ray of hope for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The decisions of the SSF convention marked the start of intense activity in our organization. The larger clubs arranged their own peace rallies, while others took part in SP demonstrations, but all of them felt a strong need to do their part and close ranks in a final attempt to deter the terrible tragedy of armed warfare.

The Federation newspapers, of course, stood in the forefront of the peace campaign. The Norwegian-Danish paper, *Socialdemokraten*, was edited at the time by party associate H. Th. Thomsen, a clever journalist and a loyal supporter of the Federation's principles on the war issue.[1] As our offices were right next door, we had ample opportunity for daily consultations, which proved more than useful during this period of crisis.

Our opposition to the war accelerated in momentum and reached its peak in the last issue of *Svenska Socialisten* before the United States declared war on Germany. In that issue a bitterly worded editorial concluded with the pronouncement that if war were declared, it would not be at our instigation. War was declared, however, and before long its fiery breath was scorching our very doors.

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Peace Work under Ban

The first reminder of the risks involved in advocating peace in a country under arms came only a few short days after the American declaration of war on April 7, 1917, against Germany and its allies. One morning, while on my way to work, I opened the morning paper and found to my disagreeable surprise that the newspaper offices at 2003 North California Avenue were the subject of a first-page article, whose tone was anything less than congenial. Doing us the honors was none other than the major daily, the *Chicago Tribune*, whose apparent aim and purpose was to incite the masses against our "pacifist den." The immediate reason for this attention was a poster headlined "The Victims of War," which we had hung in our office window and forgotten to remove after the declaration of war. The poster reproduced photographs of several bullet-ridden soldiers, one of whom had lost both his arms and his legs. In other words, it could hardly have been intended to promote the interests of armed conflict, a point that the *Tribune* emphasized to its readers. Strangely enough, the article only mentioned the newspaper *Socialdemokraten* and its editor by name. Apparently, some ill-intending person had sent the *Tribune* a copy of the newspaper, indicating that it was responsible for the pacifist poster.

Upon my arrival at the office, however, I found, to my own satisfaction, that the *Tribune* article had missed its mark, despite the inciteful language. There was no crowd of irate protesters outside our door, and the rest of the day passed without further notice. Editor H. Th. Thomsen, whose name had been mentioned in the article, also took the matter calmly. His only remark was, "We'll have to get used to things like that in the future." And that is what we did, too. Over the course of the next two years we never felt safe from surprises of this nature, surprises that often made us wonder how long we could continue to publish our newspapers.

My first run-in with the law was not long in coming. One day, some weeks later, I received a telephone call from a postal inspector, who ordered me to appear at his office the following day. When I arrived, I was immediately ushered in and subjected to rigorous questioning. He wanted to know the reason for our chilly stance on the war issue, whether we approved of the "infamous" St. Louis Declaration of the Socialist Party, as it was known at the time, and if it were true that our sympathies were basically pro-German in nature.

tion, Wilson approached the United States Congress with a request for a declaration of war against Germany and its allies. The official declaration came as no surprise. Once the German U-boats began to ravage the seas, sinking on sight merchant ships carrying contraband, it became increasingly clear that the days of peace were numbered. More than anything else, the sinking of the *Lusitania* fanned the flames of war propaganda and elicited a sharp note of protest from President Wilson to the German government. Many other notes followed, heightening the tone of official protest, but without risking a complete break of diplomatic relations. That did not materialize until after Wilson's reelection was secured.

On April 7, 1917, the same day of the American declaration of war against Germany, the Socialist Party convened its fateful convention in St. Louis. This was the setting for the famous "St. Louis Declaration," whose adoption by the party was also a declaration of war—against war. The Declaration condemned the American declaration of war in the sharpest terms, branding the conflict as a full-blown capitalist war. The working class, it stated, had nothing to gain from this type of struggle and would best serve its own interests by showing union support for the return to peaceful conditions. The claim could probably be made that this document is unique in the history of the international socialist movement, although the comparatively low numerical strength of the Socialist Party at the time reduced the document's status to a mere declaration of principle. Had the German socialist party and its impressively large membership taken such a stance in 1914, perhaps this conflagration might have been avoided.

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The Scandinavian Socialist Federation and World War I

On March 25–27, 1917, a few short weeks prior to the Socialist Party convention, the Scandinavian Socialist Federation held its own convention in Chicago, the second in order since its founding in 1910. Only ten member clubs were in attendance because of the financial strain on small clubs and, in part, because of the overhanging threat of war. The major item on the agenda was, of course, the SSF's position in the event of war. The SSF was fully aware of the peace efforts advanced by the Socialist Party and approved of them down to the last detail. Debate on the war issue was therefore limited to protests against the government's war policy and to resolute demands for a peaceful solution to the conflict with Germany. A resolution to this effect was adopted and its main contents spelled out in telegrams to congressional representatives.

The news of the Russian czar's downfall, which had arrived some days earlier, was greeted with jubilant rejoicing, and inspired Frithjof Werenskjold, a delegate of the Karl Marx Club in Chicago, to deliver a fiery congratulatory speech, in which he heralded the exploits of the Russian revolutionaries.

The Chicago convention did not adopt any definite procedural instructions for the SSF in the event of war. Having documented their steadfast desire for peace, the delegates thought it wisest to await the position taken by the Socialist Party convention in April and then follow its guidelines. It was a well-known fact that the Federation and the SP were united on the war issue; therefore, it was taken for granted that a possible decision in April could be unconditionally accepted by the Scandinavian clubs and, probably, also by other foreign-language federations.

Although the atmosphere surrounding the SSF convention was one of a youthful fighting spirit, it was tempered by a strong feeling of responsibility in the face of an unknown future. Most of the Federation's members were young men, who would doubtlessly be expected to enlist if war were declared or would simply be drafted if compulsory military service were enacted. How would they be affected by the Federation's antiwar declarations? Legally, we had the right to agitate for peace as long as our country was still deliberating its course of action, but did we have the right to

Following the cremation act, Hill's ashes were dispatched in small envelopes to IWW locals across the country, to be released to the four winds in accordance with Joe Hill's last will and testament.[4] This marked the final episode in the tragic odyssey of the proletarian troubadour from Gävle, Sweden.

19

On the Eve of World War I

The SSF took a clearly neutral position from the very start on the outbreak of European hostilities in 1914. Like the rank and file of the Socialist Party, the Federation regarded the war as a struggle between the competing superpowers in Europe, a struggle for export markets quite simply, and one in which the working class had nothing to gain, regardless of the victor. Responding to a questionnaire circulated to the foreign-language press by the magazine *The Literary Digest*, *Svenska Socialisten* found an opportunity to advocate that standpoint to more than a million magazine readers.[1] In so doing, it drew justifiable attention to itself, as none of the surveyed newspapers shared the same opinion. Most of the other Swedish-American papers were decidedly pro-German in their leanings on the issue.[2]

The American declaration of neutrality in the European conflict began to falter at an early stage. Every threat to the foundations of the British Empire made it abundantly clear that Uncle Sam could not avoid intervention if it were to save mighty Albion from disaster. That big capitalism took the side of the Western powers from the first days of the conflict was only to be expected, as enormous fortunes were being made at the time on exports of weapons, foodstuffs, and other goods to both England and France. During the presidential campaign of 1916, the "hawks" threw their support to the Republican candidate, Charles E. Hughes, but refrained from taking an open stance on the issue of armed intervention. Meanwhile, the "doves" rallied around President Woodrow Wilson, campaigning for his reelection on the slogan "He kept us out of war!" which, if nothing else, won the vote of the average voter.

The true party of peace, the Socialist Party, was shunted to the side in some respects during the 1916 campaign. This was partially due to the fact that its presidential candidate, Allan Benson, was so little known, but it was obviously much more attributable to fears of a Republican victory among those opposed to the war and to the resulting show of support for Wilson's reelection. Many people who ordinarily would have voted the socialist ticket also deserted their party at the polls for fear that socialist votes would split the antiwar ballot and, in reality, hand a majority to the "hawks."

Wilson's narrow margin of victory and the pitiful demise of the dream of peace belong to history. Just one month and three days after his reelec-

under the laws of the state of Utah, the decision met with general surprise and indignation, which later swelled to a nationwide protest. This protest movement had as its initial object a reversal of the guilty sentence in a higher court. When the appeal was denied by the Utah Supreme Court on July 3, 1915, the protesters made a direct appeal to Utah Governor William Spry to stay the execution in order to give Hill's defense an opportunity to present new evidence for his innocence. The case aroused such attention that the Swedish Minister to the United States, in Washington, D.C., W. A. F. Ekengren, intervened on Hill's behalf. Nothing, not even a telegram from President Woodrow Wilson, could alter the Utah governor's decision to carry out sentence against the troubadour of the IWW. At dawn on November 19, 1915, a firing squad ended the life of Joe Hill inside the walls of the Utah state penitentiary.

To the very end Joe Hill insisted that he was innocent, and he approached his impending execution without fear of death. Under the Utah state laws, he had the right to choose his method of execution, by the hangman's noose or by the firing squad, and he chose the latter. He took his last steps without faltering, and when he had been strapped to the death chair, he gave the order, "Fire!," to his executioners, who pierced his heart with their bullets.

The night before he died, Joe Hill wrote his last poem. He called it "My Last Will," which in a few short lines reveals his character in all of its gripping simplicity, a final testament to his innocence. It is hard to imagine how a criminal could think such thoughts and commit them to writing only a few short hours before his death.

My will is easy to decide,
For there is nothing to divide.
My kin don't need to fuss and moan—
"Moss does not cling to a rolling stone."
My body?—Oh!—if I could choose,
I would to ashes it reduce,
And let the merry breezes blow
My dust to where some flowers grow.
Perhaps some fading flower then
Would come to life and bloom again.
This is my last and final will.
Good luck to all of you.

Joe Hill.

When the firing squad's salvo rang out, a small band of Swedes stood outside the prison walls. They were all members of the SSF club in Salt Lake City and had often given encouragement to Joe Hill by visiting him at the penitentiary. Perhaps they hoped that the clemency appeals for which they had sacrificed so much over the course of eleven months would finally soften the cold heart of the Utah governor. When the firing squad provided the final answer to their appeal, an indignant cry arose from their ranks, followed by a moment of intense silence. The shots had scarcely reverberated off the walls of the Rocky Mountains, when the uplifted strains of the "Internationale" united this small band of friends in a final promise to their fallen comrade that the flag of freedom, now lifeless in his hands, would be carried on.

Several days before his death, Joe Hill had written a letter to Bill Haywood, the general secretary of the IWW, in which he asked that his remains be transported across the border to the state of Wyoming. "I don't want to be found dead in Utah," he wrote. Both this request and the content of his "Last Will" were carried out to the last detail. An IWW escort accompanied his remains to Chicago, where the organization's headquarters took charge of funeral arrangements. His coffin was taken to one of the city's largest trade union halls, and there scores of people, sympathizers and others, were given an opportunity to pay their last respects to the victim of justice in the Mormon state of Utah.

It is estimated that between 25,000 and 30,000 persons formed a deathwatch around the large meeting hall where Joe Hill's funeral took place. The ceremony began with a choir singing "Workers of the World, Awaken," and through the open windows one could hear the crowds outside echoing the familiar strains. Afterwards, Judge Orrin N. Hilton, who had led the clemency appeals, delivered an emotional funeral oration in which he declared his resolute conviction that all of us mourned a victim of errant justice. His remarks were followed by vocal contributions from two soloists, one in Italian and the other in Swedish. The latter was sung by the well-known tenor John Chellman.[3] The gripping funeral ceremony concluded with the singing of one of Joe Hill's own songs, "The Rebel Girl," by the Polish singer Jennie Wasczinska.

After the funeral, Hill's coffin was taken by train to Graceland Cemetery for cremation. Along the procession route marched a mile-long throng of mourners. Closest to the coffin strode a group of members from the Rockford IWW club, carrying a fiery red flag with the IWW emblem in black and gold.

Scores of new clubs were organized, partly by Texas himself and partly as a result of his campaigning, while the older clubs gained encouragement from spiraling membership figures and a renewed fighting spirit. It was with a feeling of genuine loss that we paid farewell to this intrepid campaigner when he returned to Sweden at the close of his tour.

America's entrance into World War I prevented our securing the services of other native Swedish activists. We had set our sights on Zeth Höglund and Karl Kilbom, but all of our negotiations stranded because of the unsettled international situation.[12] Kilbom was kind enough, however, to send us a series of dispatches for publication in *Svenska Socialisten.*

18

Joe Hill

One cannot talk about the Swedish-born activists of the American labor movement without thinking of Joe Hill, the troubadour-rebel whose tragic fate marks such a dark chapter in the history of American justice.[1]

Josef Hillström, as he was known in Sweden, was not a member of any of the socialist parties but rather the Industrial Workers of the World, which became his haven both in life and death. He came to America shortly after the turn of the century [in October 1902] and eventually settled out west, but not in any one place. He took whatever jobs came his way, working off and on as a lumberjack and a rail layer for the railroads, like thousands of his countrymen during that period. He seems to have learned English incredibly fast and was soon using his skills to write poems that depicted the struggle for existence, as it was waged in the work camps along the West Coast. It was here that he also came in contact with the IWW, that unique organization of nomadic proletarians out west. Hill felt at home in their company, and for them he wrote his best songs.

His texts were full of biting satire that scourged the lethargy of the nonunion worker and ridiculed the preacher's promises of "pie in the sky when you die" for those content with their lot in this world. Many of his poems were campaign songs of great importance, such as "We Will Sing One Song" and "Workers of the World, Awaken." Hill set his own texts to music, and they were later sung at rallies and in work camps. It often happened that he was present as a total stranger at gatherings where his own songs were sung. He loved poetry and freedom, and it was a part of his nature that he was drawn to the unconditional life of a bohemian, which was a rich reservoir of adventure and new ideas for the poetic imagination.

Joe Hill met his fate in Salt Lake City, the Mormon capital, where his wanderings took him one unlucky day. He found work with the Utah Construction Company, but when he participated in a strike called by the IWW, he drew the attention of the local authorities, who stamped him as an agitator and a social menace. When a murder, apparently in connection with a robbery, was committed in the city one January night in 1914, suspicions were directed against Joe Hill, who was imprisoned and charged with the crime.[2] The evidence presented was so shoddy, however, that no one who followed the trial expected a conviction. When the jury did pass sentence on the accused, a verdict synonymous with the death penalty

League.[7] At great personal expense, Wald managed to keep the publication alive for more than a decade, during which it retained a comparatively high literary standard. Native Swedish contributors to *Bokstugan* included the author Anna Lenah Elgström and Stockholm mayor Carl Lindhagen, while Swedish-American contributors were represented by Aksel Josephson, a Chicago librarian; Gustaf L. Larson, of the same city; as well as Carl Sahlin and Walfrid Engdahl, both of Minneapolis.[8]

16

A New Newspaper and New Difficulties

It was only natural that the well-organized Norwegian-Danish branches of the Scandinavian Socialist Federation would not be content in the long run with a party newspaper printed exclusively in Swedish. Shortly after the relocation of *Svenska Socialisten* to Chicago, they made plans to rectify the situation by publishing in their own languages. A Chicago Social-Democratic weekly, *Revyen* (The Review), was already being published privately in Dano-Norwegian by a Dane named Christian Bötker, but the Federation was suspicious of party newspapers operated by private individuals.[1] When Bötker turned down its offer to purchase *Revyen*, the Federation decided to start a brand-new paper called *Socialdemokraten* (The Social Democrat), which, like *Svenska Socialisten*, was issued as a weekly. In the beginning, editorial responsibilities were managed by a committee, but when this proved unsatisfactory, the Federation hired Frank Hurop as editor.[2] A pioneer in the Danish labor movement, Hurop had been immersed in activism at an early age. Among other distinctions, he was the founder and first chairman of the Danish Blacksmiths' and Machinists' Union.

The entrance of *Socialdemokraten* into the socialist campaign stimulated activities in the Norwegian-Danish clubs, but the paper never evolved as a going concern. Launched with insufficient capital and with poor means of increasing circulation, it proved a new burden on the Federation from the very start. As a party organ, however, it filled a role and a need in the cause of socialist propaganda. Christian Bötker, editor of *Revyen*, could never forgive his comrades for giving him competition but complimented them on their enterprise. The only reason he did so, however, was because he considered *Socialdemokraten* "dry" enough to light the fire in his stove every morning.

Meanwhile, *Svenska Socialisten* was creating new problems for the Federation. The practice of keeping subscription prices low, at a dollar per year, combined with a relatively high overhead, made it impossible to balance the accounts. Aside from the two editors' salaries, $18 per week each, there were expenditures for rent and printing, and increasing revenues simply did not foot the bill. The $1,000 fund was exhausted in less than a year, and in the spring of 1914, the situation took a rapid turn for

those arrested in the *Amalthea* incident. It did so, not because it sympathized with their actions, but because it believed that as long as the crime had been provoked by foreign strikebreakers there were grounds for extenuating circumstances, and for that reason the jail sentences already served should be considered sufficient penalty. *Svenska Socialisten* published a special *Amalthea* issue, and despite all of the criticism it received, the paper kept up its clemency campaign until it had achieved its purpose.

The first clemency appeal on behalf of those involved in the *Amalthea* incident was issued by the Scandinavian section of the Industrial Workers of the World. When a working committee was organized later on, it included a representative of the Scandinavian Socialist Federation as well as representatives of the Verdandi Lodge Fria Tankar and the Swedish Liberty League.[3] The Scandinavian federation of the Socialist Labor Party and the newspaper *Arbetaren* (New York) dissociated themselves from the movement, but that did not prevent a certain show of sympathy from several of the federation clubs. Naturally, the Swedish-American mainstream societies took absolutely no interest in the *Amalthea* movement.

The cooperation between the Scandinavian Socialist Federation and the IWW, along with other antipolitical elements, was, however, only temporary. There were members of our organization who also belonged to the IWW, but the two organizations themselves maintained their distance. The IWW asserted that workers had nothing to win in the political arena, while our organization shared the Social Democratic viewpoint that trade unions and the political party were the twin branches of the labor movement.

During the years 1913 and 1914, there was an abundance of different points of view among the Swedish workers of Chicago, as was doubtlessly the case among their compatriots in other American cities with sizeable Swedish populations. The Great Strike of 1909 in Sweden had forced thousands of workers into exile, among them many active members from various camps within the labor movement. Each of them preferred, of course, to remain active in an organization that stood closest to the one he had left behind. If none could be found, he joined other like-minded workers in establishing a separate association. The Social Democrats affiliated themselves with the Scandinavian Socialist Federation, a wing of the Socialist Party, and the Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation (SSLF), a wing of the Socialist Labor Party. The Syndicalists, meanwhile, and the Young Socialists formed a Scandinavian section of the IWW. Another group organized several lodges of the Verdandi Order, and even a number of anarchists established themselves as an independent group. For a period of time, the anarchists published their own propaganda paper, a

monthly called *Revolt*, which was edited and published by Theodor Johnson, a streetcar conductor.[4]

As was to be expected, *Revolt* served largely as a forum for deprecating the political arm of the labor movement, but since the paper had a very limited circulation, its tirades did not cause us much concern. On one occasion, however, I could not resist the temptation of giving the paper a minor rap on the knuckles, and when I did so, all hell broke loose. I had been so indiscreet as to call the publication a "little anarchist newspaper," a remark that only served to infuriate its editor, Theodor Johnson. Replying in frenzied fashion, Johnson invoked his readers' condemnation of *Svenska Socialisten* and advised the Socialist Federation to send its editor right back to school, where he could be taught proper manners and learn to know when to keep his nose out of other people's business.

While this type of scolding did not really sit well with me, I did not let my antagonist know anything of my irritation. My reply came in a few short lines, where I attempted to make clear in a somewhat superior tone that *Svenska Socialisten* did not consider personal insults worthy of a rejoinder. Deep down inside, however, I could only share my antagonist's opinion, that being sent back to school might not have hurt me a bit, but I consoled myself with the thought that when all was said and done Johnson had spent less time in school than I had.

Some time later Johnson turned over the editorship of the paper to a Young Socialist by the name of Eugen Alban, who had recently immigrated to the States.[5] Alban carried on in much the same fashion as Johnson but soon tired of the business and returned to Sweden, where he eventually made a name for himself as a writer.

Another member of Chicago's Young Socialist vanguard at the time was a Stockholm emigrant by the name of Wilhelm Södergren. His interest in the labor movement soon sputtered out, however, and he turned to the study of spiritualism instead, opening his home to spiritualistic seances. Apparently Södergren was utterly and firmly convinced that it was possible to make contact with the spirit world by means of specially talented mediums.

Also active in Young Socialist circles was a painter by the name of Wallentin Wald, who had emigrated from Stockholm after serving a prison sentence for disseminating pacifist leaflets.[6] Wald's first initiative was to organize the Verdandi Lodge Fria Tankar, and when interest in this type of temperance movement waned, he organized the Verdandi Study League. Supported by a number of other literary-minded persons, he published a magazine called *Bokstugan* (The Book Cabin) as the official organ of the

of the newspaper was impounded at the Calumet post office, where there were apparent sympathies for the mine owners. This was repeated over the course of several weeks, and when trade union representatives inquired about the shipments, they were simply told that none had arrived. Since we were able to prove that the papers had been sent regularly from Chicago, the postal clerk finally thought it best to turn over the packages, which had been stashed away in a corner of the post office.

15

Skirmishes to the Left and Right

At times we actually managed to convince our colleagues in the Swedish-American press to take a stand on current labor issues and even problems of a political nature. This was especially the case when we happened to criticize the ruling power in Sweden or even the Swedish Royal House. When details of the legal battle around the so-called *Amalthea* incident were brought to the attention of Swedish Americans by a number of Young Socialists, the newspapers reacted bitterly to our stance in favor of clemency for the jailed Malmö activists.[1]

Their reaction was the same when we opposed the campaign in Sweden to raise funds for the construction of an armored warship, the well-known F-Boat, for the Swedish navy, a measure that had won the support of the bourgeois press.[2] Our flag-waving colleagues accused us of another flagrant indiscretion when we made light of the Swedish farmers' march on Stockholm in 1914, the famous "Bondetåget." Nor were they pleased when we dared to claim that the workers' march on Stockholm, which occurred shortly thereafter, gave a more correct interpretation of the feelings among the broad masses of the Swedish population than the farmers' meeting with King Gustav V. It was really pathetic to read their lamentations over the radical standpoint on these issues. "The Swedes in this country have never involved themselves in Sweden's internal affairs, and it is obvious that they have forfeited all right to do so" ran one editorial in *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* (Minneapolis, Minnesota) in reply to the *Amalthea* incident. The same editorial was fairly littered with false and misleading information.

Svenska Socialisten responded vehemently:

> Such comments were never heard when the flag-waving patriots in Sweden started raising funds for the construction of the F-Boat, which the Swedish "people" presented to the Royal Navy last year. If memory serves us right, on that occasion *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* was first in line to "involve itself in Sweden's internal affairs" by asserting that Swedish Americans should join in on the F-Boat campaign.

The Scandinavian Socialist Federation lent heavy support, however, to

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14

Svenska Socialisten Grows in Size and Influence

During the summer of 1912, the campaign on behalf of *Svenska Socialisten* had already enough wind in its sails to bolster the idea of expanding the paper's size. Actually, the first to advance such a proposal were members of the Rockford Socialist Club. They had the good fortune of securing a clever advertising agent by the name of Birger Mortenson, who often managed to fill an entire newspaper page with paid advertising from Rockford alone.[1] Since its inception, *Svenska Socialisten* had been a four-page paper of five columns' width. The Rockford Club was proposing to double this, on the condition that we could raise a guarantee fund of $1,000 and secure an additional thousand subscribers.

The proposal was received enthusiastically by the Federation membership, who voted unanimously for its adoption. As the strongest Federation section, the Rockford Club immediately took the initiative in collecting cash funds and new subscribers. One of its most industrious members, a young emigrant from Östergötland named Herman Hallstrom, was elected treasurer of the expansion fund, and under his efficient and energetic leadership, the campaign was soon under way. As treasurer, Hallstrom demonstrated an organizational resourcefulness that was somewhat unique among Swedish immigrants, and some years later, this would push him into the forefront of Rockford's political life. During the remaining months of 1912, Hallstrom's efforts assumed truly gigantic proportions, igniting the fever pace of the campaign and resulting in a fairly steady stream of new subscriptions and cash donations. By the turn of the year, approximately half of the guarantee fund had been collected, and the enthusiastic Rockford Socialist Club went ahead with its plans to arrange a campaign bazaar, allocating $400 of the proceeds to the expansion fund. With that, the campaign quota was nearly filled, but by then Hallstrom's own energies were almost exhausted. During the two weeks the campaign bazaar was in progress he had refused all rest, and as a result, he caught a severe cold that kept him in bed for several weeks.

On April 10, 1913, *Svenska Socialisten* came out with its first eight-page issue. Joining the paper that month as coeditor was Oscar Granberg, a party associate from Omaha, Nebraska. An emigrant from

northern Sweden, Granberg had earned certification as a Swedish public school teacher, but as far as I can recall, he had never previously been active in the socialist movement. Prior to his appointment to the editorial staff of the paper, he had been employed by the Swedish-American weekly *Omaha-Posten.*

The paper's expanded format enabled it to offer its readers a more diversified content scope. Previously, column space was almost exclusively reserved for propaganda articles, but now there was room for both news items and lighter reading. The news department acquired particular importance because at that time the Swedish-American press systematically avoided all news of interest to the labor movement. The editor of one of the large Chicago Swedish papers, for example, had assured his readers that as long as he remained editor in chief the Swedish socialist movement would receive absolutely no coverage in his columns. The same generally applied to coverage of the American labor movement, and in the eyes of the Swedish-American press lords, our Swedish-American socialist federation and our own little newspaper simply did not exist. Actually, this attitude was rather strange, considering the fact that the editorial staffs of the Swedish newspapers at that time were among the worst-paid professional groups.

What our immigrant colleagues refused to print, *Svenska Socialisten* did its best to highlight, filling its columns with news about strikes and lockouts as well as political news of general labor interest. The significance of this was dramatized by the great copper mine strike in Calumet, Michigan, in 1913–1914.[2] From the very start of the conflict, *Svenska Socialisten* followed developments on the spot and drew a lot of attention with its disclosures of strikebreaking by a number of Swedish workers. The local trade union showed its appreciation by placing a long-term order for 100 copies of the paper, which it distributed every week to the Calumet Swedes. This gave *Svenska Socialisten* an opportunity to demonstrate how even a small foreign-language newspaper could thwart the intentions of the power lords by supporting the cause of striking workers in a labor conflict.

The Calumet strike came to a peak in the hideous events that took place on Christmas Eve in 1913, which cost the lives of nearly eighty of the workers' wives and children. The local trade union was holding a children's party in its meeting hall, and while this was in progress, a group of hoodlums gathered outside and, at a given signal, began to shout "Fire!" Panic resulted, and scores of persons were trampled to death.

Svenska Socialisten was enraged at the atrocity, and its reaction found absolutely no favor with the mining company. A package containing copies

campaign, and new associates were added as time went by. The newspaper office at 911 Belmont Avenue soon became a rendezvous for a sizable crowd of party activists, most of them young and inexperienced but all the more enthusiastic and enterprising.

Two young immigrants from Småland, a lithographer by the name of Gideon Edberg and a machinist called Oscar Borg, were of particular help to me. Gideon came up to the office every evening to lend a hand with such things as correspondence and subscription lists, but he was also adept at composing copy for propaganda pieces and news articles. It was a great loss for me personally when he left Chicago some years later to join his company's operations in New York. Far from deserting the movement, Gideon immediately filed for membership in the New York Swedish Socialist Club, where he soon became one of its most active members. After several years in New York, he moved again, this time to Minneapolis, where he found employment with a dairy cooperative. Here, too, his talents were readily recognized, and he won quick promotion. On several occasions he was elected a delegate to the conference of cooperatives, and one time he attended an international congress of cooperatives in Europe.

Oscar Borg was also a dedicated staff member, especially in the advertising department. Shortly after he volunteered his service to the paper, his employer promoted him to a responsible position, which severely limited his free time. Nevertheless, I could always rely on him when help was needed.

The encouragement those young men gave me during my first strenuous years as editor was particularly welcome. All the cares and concerns of the long workday disappeared on evenings when the office was filled with a crowd of young people, who joked and horseplayed for a while before settling down around a table for an hour of serious discussion. What united this group and made the work all the more enjoyable was a spirit of good cheer and devotion to the cause. Those who had participated in the activities of the Swedish Social-Democratic youth movement could also testify that the atmosphere and the editorial staff of *Svenska Socialisten* were charged with the same fighting spirit evident from the earliest days of that movement in Sweden.

No small measure of physical energy and dedication was required to carry out all of the editorial responsibilities for the newspaper. A normal working day stretched from 8:00 A.M. until 10:00 P.M., except on Sundays, when I granted myself the luxury of leaving the office around noon. The task of editing the paper was demanding enough, especially for a person of my limited experience, but I also had such chores as securing advertising,

correcting address lists, and keeping the accounts. The business of correcting address lists was particularly time-consuming. In America, newspaper subscribers must send their payments directly to the newspaper, where upon receipt they are recorded not only in the account books but also on the address lists, which notify the subscriber of the new expiration date. The same procedure is followed in the case of address changes.

Our greatest concern, however, was finding ways to increase our circulation. At that time total subscriptions were fewer than two thousand, and we had to surpass that figure if we were ever to resolve our financial difficulties. My first step was to launch a letter campaign, urging all who could, to help us toward our goal of financial stability. I subsequently ran a special column in the paper, publicizing the names of subscription agents and the number of new readers each had tallied during the week. This approach gave the campaign the flavor of a competition, and the results surpassed our expectations. The satisfaction of seeing their names in print at the head of the lists spurred our agents to do their utmost, despite the fact that their sole compensation was the pleasure of winning a weekly competition. We continued to use the very same method as long as *Svenska Socialisten* and its successor were being published. Even our New York compatriots on the staff of *Arbetaren* were won over to the idea, once they realized that it had far more value than being the object of pitiful ridicule.

ties, it appeared that the paper's future had brightened considerably.

Nesvant's energetic contributions to *Svenska Socialisten* were short-lived, however, for after only a month and a half of toiling as editor and business manager, he found he could not continue the pace. He therefore tendered his resignation with the recommendation that an editorial staff volunteer, a young man who had spent all of his evenings and Sundays at the newspaper office since the move to Chicago, be designated his successor. The Federation executive accepted Nesvant's resignation and his recommendation, although the choice of a successor opened the doors to a great deal of uncertainty and dark speculation as to the paper's future. Nesvant's candidate was none other than I.

There was no denying that I shared the executive's uneasiness. True, both of my predecessors had had less experience as journalists at the time they assumed office, but that fact did not enhance my own qualifications. My entire journalistic training, if one can call it that, was limited to several months as a local correspondent and advertising agent in Port Arthur for the Winnipeg newspaper *Canada Posten* and the roughly fifteen months I had spent on the staff of *Svenska Socialisten*. Once, while still a youngster in Sweden, I had gotten an article published in Johan Lindström Saxon's newspaper *Såningsmannen* (The Sower), but on neither side of the Atlantic had I found an opportunity to try my hand at journalism under the guidance of a veteran in the trade.[2]

My major concern was my still underdeveloped knowledge of the movement whose ideas I was now called upon to propagate. While I had devoted several years of study to the socialist press and a large number of propaganda pamphlets, I had never thought that this would prepare me for a leading position as a party official. I had made a serious attempt to study the works of key German socialists, but this was not enough to provide a thorough understanding of basic socialist principles. On the other hand, I had faithfully devoured Eugene Debs's fiery speeches and writings, and through them, my socialist outlook eventually took on more of the movement's humanistic spirit and demands for social justice than its scientific underpinnings. Nevertheless, there was probably a certain strength to my understanding of the movement, and this perhaps explains why I was kept on as editor longer than anyone else, either before or after me. It also reflects a basic characteristic of the Swedish-American worker, who was not particularly prone to digesting commentaries on the classic tenets of the socialist movement. What he did read was of a socially critical nature, discussion-oriented articles and advisory pieces on issues that dealt with his own daily struggle for existence.

I had a feeling from the very start that the Federation executive would not be unanimous in its decision, and this was confirmed in due course. Those who voiced the greatest concern over my selection as editor were the Federation's Norwegian-Danish members. This was not surprising either, in view of the fact that they had compared my party experience with their own, while weighing in the balance the major sacrifices they had made in order to set the paper on its feet. Under these circumstances, then, they could not help but express deep concern over the wisdom of allowing an inexperienced youth to manage the party's only propaganda organ. At least one of the Norwegians, a veteran socialist by the name of N. F. Holm, also voiced doubts about the sincerity of my beliefs. Several days after I started work, he came up to the office, pushed his cap low on the back of his head, and then just stood there for a long while gazing at me over his glasses, which always hung down on his nose. Finally, he asked me if I knew where he could find Charles Sand, and when I gave him the address, he left without even giving me the courtesy of a "Good-bye." A couple of days later, our Norwegian typographer told me that he had asked Holm what he thought about the paper's new editor. "You want to know what I think of him?" the old man had answered with a angry grimace. "Well, I'll be damned if you can call that lad a socialist."

That was hardly a compliment, but I took it in stride. The future would have to decide whether Holm was a good judge of human character. I probably never matched up to his ideal of the genuine socialist, but that did not stand in the way of our relatively good working relationship over the course of several years. I even acquired a certain liking for the old jug of vinegar. In any event, I admired his spirit of self-sacrifice and unfailing energy when it came to furthering the work of the organization. On different occasions he not only served as the director of the Socialist Singing Society, as a member of the newspaper committee, and the Norwegian-Danish meeting hall committee, but he even headed up a socialist Sunday school program. It was a complete mystery to me how an old rough-hewn party veteran like Holm could find a following among a group of children.

Oscar Nesvant's appointment to the editorship of *Svenska Socialisten* appeared to inject a more hopeful spirit among the paper's friends, and luckily for me, this trend continued after I succeeded him in office. Although the distrustful attitude of our Norwegian-Danish comrades was somewhat discouraging, it spurred me to do my level best. Failure was the farthest thought from my mind, and I received both help and encouragement. The Dawn brothers continued to devote their time to the subscription

Hallden's resignation meant that the newspaper committee in Chicago was assigned full responsibility for the paper's publication, a task it accepted without delay or hesitation. At a meeting held on April 22, the committee decided to rent an office in Lake View, the largest Swedish district in Chicago, to sign a printing contract with a suitable firm, and to select a new editor. This position was filled by Charles Sand, a professional carpenter and a longtime member of the English-language party section on Chicago's North Side. Sand was a good speaker and had on several occasions been nominated as the party's candidate to city council. Although he never stood a chance of election, he won a strong following in both Swedish and American circles.

Sand assumed the editor's chair on May 24, 1911, and on June 7, *Svenska Socialisten* appeared for the first time as a Chicago newspaper. The subsequent months were a busy time for the paper's friends and associates. With the shift in editorial responsibility, our Rockford comrades devoted all of their energies to increasing the paper's circulation, and their efforts exceeded all expectations. For many years the city of Rockford held the lead in the subscription department.

Working out of its new headquarters, the newspaper staff also campaigned heavily for subscriptions, primarily in the Chicago area, where prominent contributions were made by Carl and John Dawn. Carl, in particular, was a longtime supporter of the paper and assumed as his motto "at least one new subscriber per day." Week after week he fulfilled this pledge with unflagging energy.

Similar efforts were made on behalf of the paper in other sections of the country, but apparently this spirit of self-sacrifice could not compensate for the added economic burdens that faced the paper as a result of the move to Chicago. Operating expenses had more than doubled since the Rockford period, while revenues were almost exclusively limited to subscription fees and single-copy sales. As the paper initially gave little attention to revenues from paid advertising, it "paid" for its own negligence later on.

The situation remained stable, however, as long as the paper could draw on its $800 cash allotment, but these funds rapidly diminished. By October they were altogether depleted, and the paper was also in debt to the printers. As a matter of course, the editor received most of the blame for the situation, and Sand was singled out for criticism, especially from the Federation's Norwegian-Danish members. Exasperated by his thankless responsibilities, Sand submitted his resignation at a board meeting on November 29, 1911, but promised to stay on until February 15, 1912.

In early December, the newspaper faced its first major crisis since

relocating to Chicago. The treasury was almost empty, and the printers refused to extend further credit. *Svenska Socialisten* weathered this storm, however. At a board meeting on December 10, where a number of Norwegian-Danish members were also in attendance, all of those present pledged to sell subscription cards valued at $215. This was enough of a guarantee for the printers, primarily in view of the fact that a substantial number of the pledges were paid in cash.

At the height of the financial crisis, other problems loomed on the horizon. Editor Charles Sand had leveled a severe attack on a prominent Swedish trade unionist, Oscar Nelson, who was also involved in bourgeois party politics. One day Nelson stepped into Sand's office and pressed for redress. In one of his articles, Sand had labeled Nelson's involvement in reactionary politics as "villainous," and it was this rather rash remark that had provoked Nelson's anger. Sand stood his ground, however, and refused categorically to retract his statement. Nelson left eventually, but only after he had threatened Sand with bodily harm and a libel suit. Nelson's threats were only that, as second thoughts apparently told him that it would hardly enhance his status as a trade unionist to appear in court as the plaintiff in a libel suit against a working-class newspaper.

On February 15, 1912, Charles Sand stepped down as editor of *Svenska Socialisten* and returned to his former profession. Sometime thereafter, he was elected secretary of his trade union branch, and a year or so later, he advanced to the post of general secretary of the Carpenters' District Council, the umbrella organization for the various local chapters of the Chicago carpenters' trade union. In this capacity Sand won the undivided respect of his fellow workers, a statement that is best illustrated by the fact that he held that office up until his death, thirty-seven years later. Sand lost his interest in the political wing of the labor movement through his involvement in the trade union movement, where he followed the example of most American trade union leaders.

Oscar Nesvant, a veteran of *Svenska Socialisten*'s pioneer period in Rockford, was chosen to succeed Sand. The employee of a Rockford hardware store, Nesvant was not really willing to make the move, but he sacrificed his purely personal interests on behalf of the paper. His own business acumen told him from the very start that a newspaper enterprise had to be financially sound in order to succeed, and his first measure was to seek a solution to the paper's financial woes. Within a short span of time, he managed to corner a rather lucrative advertising market for the paper, which brought in an additional flow of sorely needed revenue. As Nesvant managed to accomplish this without jeopardizing his editorial responsibili-

Svenska Socialisten but found that many of the paper's readers disapproved of my critical attitude toward the Viking Order. Our Norwegian-Danish compatriots, in particular, thought it unwise to win enemies for the paper by allowing debate on an issue which, in their opinion, had nothing to do with labor politics. My articles apparently accomplished very little in terms of direct results, but they did help to publicize the newspaper among the Scandinavian population of Chicago.

13

Svenska Socialisten Moves to Chicago

Even prior to the holding of the first Federation convention, the Chicago Scandinavian clubs had launched plans to relocate *Svenska Socialisten* to Chicago. Over the course of several years, a joint propaganda committee had set aside a fund for this purpose, which by early 1911 had raised about $1,000. A sum of $800 was allocated to *Svenska Socialisten* from this fund on the condition that the money would be used to cover moving costs and extra expenditures during the initial months in Chicago. Following a period of negotiations, the Federation bought the newspaper from the Rockford club and began immediate preparations for relocation. The propaganda committee appointed a three-man newspaper committee to carry out initial operations. Members of this committee were John Dawn, Carl Bergström, and Otto Svendsen, all of them staunch party veterans. They were supported by an auxiliary committee consisting of Charles Sand, Carl Dawn, John Nordlund, E. Fernquist, Stephen Christensen, and Henry Bengston. All of these men had long years of experience in the socialist movement, although I was the youngest, in terms of both age and party membership.

Already at their first meeting, both committees decided to join forces, electing me as chairman and Carl Dawn as secretary.[1] We also decided to arrange a series of public campaign meetings as a means of promoting the newspaper among the Chicago Swedes. The meetings were held during the spring of 1911 and won the paper a considerable number of new subscribers. To support this campaign, the newspaper published a special Chicago issue on March 29, 1911, which contained articles by most of the committee members. A regular member of the newspaper staff at that time was the Danish-American socialist Stephen Christensen, who was also the paper's first Chicago correspondent. The Chicago issue was followed by a special weekly section for our city, edited by Charles Sand.

The newspaper's relocation to Chicago was expected to take place at the end of July 1911, but unforeseen circumstances in Rockford caused a change in these plans. In the Rockford municipal elections held in April of that year, the newspaper's editor, John Hallden, was elected to the city council, and in order to devote more time to his new position, he was forced to resign as editor.

Jämtland Province. He was one of the best workers in the lumber camp and had, when settling his accounts, taken home $600, which in those days was more than sufficient to pay for the ticket home.

Several weeks later, upon my return to Port Arthur, I took the first opportunity to head for the bar at the Kimberley Hotel, the headquarters of the Scandinavian lumberjacks, in order to find out when Soderkvist was to sail for Sweden. "The student?" answered one of the bar customers, as he looked at me over his glass. "Well, you can find him at any hour in his room above the Chinese restaurant at Cumberland Street."

Perplexed at this and suspecting the worst, I hurried over to the indicated address, where I indeed found my friend. Newly shaven and dapper, he was lying on his bed reading a book. This was a departure from the ordinary, as he and most of the other lumberjacks had grown full beards when they lived in camp. At first glance, it was hard to recognize old Soderkvist, for now he really looked like a young student. Imagine how proud his mother would have been, if his dream had become reality and he, at that very moment, had been sitting on her sofa back home. "Well, you see," he said, in reply to all of my anxious questions, "I have so many friends here in town, and all of them were so happy to see me that before I knew it my money was gone."

From one of these "friends" I later got fuller details of what had happened. It was the same old story, one that repeated itself every time a group of lumberjacks or railroad workers came to town with a couple of months' wages in their pockets. They were going to make a party of things for a while, and there was no shortage of friends as long as the money held out. After a couple of riotous weeks, the result of several months' hard labor changed hands and wound up in the pockets of a saloon keeper or brothel owner.

Several weeks later "the student" returned to the timber forests to start over, even though wage prospects during the summer season were far below the earnings to be made during the winter, when the piece-rate was inflated. It need hardly be said that this otherwise cheerful student-lumberjack left Port Arthur this time with a heavy heart. He had been looking forward so much to seeing his native country and his childhood home. Now his elderly mother would have to wait until next spring, or the spring that never came—as did so many other mothers in homes throughout Sweden.

2

A Look at the American Socialist Movement

As soon as I returned to Port Arthur, I took out a subscription to the newspaper *Arbetaren*. This was a weekly publication of the Skandinaviska Socialistiska Arbetareförbundet (Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation), which was allied with the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), the older of the two American socialist parties.

The Socialist Labor Party was founded in December 1877, in Newark, New Jersey, at a congress called by the Workingmen's Party. The latter had been organized one year earlier in Philadelphia through the merger of a number of socialist bodies whose membership was primarily of German origin. Delegates at the Newark gathering expressed the belief that the time was ripe for unilateral affiliation with the international socialist movement, and they therefore adopted the name "Socialist Labor Party."

Characteristic of the new party's composition were the twenty-six newspapers that in 1877 either directly or indirectly lent it support. Only ten of these were published in English, none of which was a daily paper. On the other hand, fourteen papers were published in German, seven of them dailies. One paper was published in Bohemian, and in Chicago the Scandinavian party members had a weekly paper called *Den Nye Tid* (The New Age).[1]

These newspapers were founded during the period of mass unemployment following the Panic of 1873. This did not mean, however, that they could rely upon the support of a reading public schooled in socialist ideas and theory, for when a new era of prosperity appeared on the scene, they scattered like chaff in the wind. As early as 1879, all of the English-language papers had ceased publication, and only three German papers were still in operation (*Philadelphia Tageblatt* and the Chicago papers *Arbeiter Zeitung* and *Vorbote*). Since there are no reports on the fate of the Scandinavian paper, one must assume that it also fell victim to the new era of prosperity.

In 1894, however, the Swedish party membership in New York was strong enough to start its own newspaper, which was christened *Arbetaren*. One of the enterprise's prime movers, Eric Nordman, was elected editor, and it was under his direction that the foundation was laid for a newspaper that could fully compete with the bourgeois Swed-

camp existence.

About ten of the sixty or more lumberjacks in camp were Swedes, and this simplified matters. As for the rest, the majority were French-speaking Canadians; there were some Finns, but all the rest were English-speaking Canadians.

Such were my surroundings during the first winter in Canada. Work was done on a contract or piece-rate basis, and wages were good, but we were also expected to put in a good day's work. At 3:00 A.M. a mess boy came into the hut or "camp," as our communal living quarters were called, and yelled his "Roll out!" Everyone jumped into his clothes, rinsed his face in ice-cold water, and then tramped over to the mess hall, where an enormous breakfast had been prepared. After breakfast each of us filled his lunch pail with a noon meal and, long before dawn, was on his way to his timber-cutting shift, which was usually a couple of miles from the base camp.

The workday lasted until 4:00 P.M., interrupted only by a short lunch break, when each of us got together with his closest neighbor to cook tea in an empty tomato can and enjoy his lunch. Now a lumberjack is known for his hearty appetite, and he could look forward to a long, hungry day if, as it sometimes happened, a squirrel discovered his lunch pail and devoured its contents. Evenings in our forest camp were never boring. Most of the lumberjacks played cards; others told stories or played the accordion and sang popular songs. Another group, which in some respects was different from the rest, gathered in a corner around a twenty-six-year-old Swede by the name of Soderkvist, nicknamed "the student" by his countrymen. An immigrant from Jämtland, "the student" had a philosophical bent and possessed unusual talents, both of mind and spirit. Good-humored and lighthearted, he enjoyed life to the fullest, even if all that was offered him was the barren reality of work in a timber forest. Yet the simple fact that he was alive and young did not satisfy him. He had a passion for discussing the larger questions of "Why" and "Wherefore." During talk sessions on winter evenings, he took delight in giving vent to his wonderment, and although he did not expect to get answers to all of his questions, he was happy for the opportunity to share them with others. It was a rare occasion when he did not draw a crowd. There is no shortage of dreamers and men of feeling among lumberjacks.

But "the student" was not completely absorbed by philosophical speculation. During the long winter evenings and over lunch breaks at the campfire, he gave me badly needed lessons in the manners and customs of this new country. Joining in on this instruction was another lumberjack by

the name of Wallin, whose idealistic interests were close to our own. A former sawmill worker from northern Sweden, Wallin had been a trade unionist and a member of the Swedish Social-Democratic Party prior to his emigration from Sweden. Both he and Soderkvist were interested in the labor movement and avidly discussed the cause of social democracy in Canada. They told me that the movement was still in its infancy, both in Canada and in the United States. Socialist organizations had developed in different parts of Canada, primarily in the western provinces, and went under a national organization called the Socialist Party of Canada.[2] In Alberta Province the Social Democrats held a majority in the provincial legislature for a couple of decades and carried out their party's programs with some measure of success.[3]

In our own province of Ontario, the movement was spearheaded by the relatively small Finnish organizations, a fact that minimized its political importance but did not discourage it from entering political campaigns from time to time. In the 1907 mayoral election in Port Arthur, the party ran a young Canadian named English as its candidate but only won a few votes. A contributing factor was the fact that the majority of the Finnish party members had not filed citizenship papers, and only citizens, of course, had the right to vote. Because of language difficulties, the assimilation of the Finns took a considerably longer period of time than, for example, that of the Scandinavians, and this meant that their political influence rarely extended beyond the confines of their own ethnic group.

Neither Wallin nor Soderkvist knew of any Swedish-speaking socialist organization in Canada, and judging from what I learned later on, there was no specifically Swedish or Scandinavian trade union movement in Canada at that time. On the other hand, the New York socialist newspaper *Arbetaren* (The Worker) was not unknown up there.[4] My informants told me they had seen a number of issues of that paper, but because of their periodic movements from place to place, they had decided not to become subscribers.

My first so-called dog year as an immigrant turned out to be considerably easier than it might have been, and for that I have to thank the first winter I spent in Canada together with my countrymen and like-minded people. It was with a sense of deep regret that I left my friends in the lumber camp in the spring of 1908.

Soderkvist, "the student," decamped a month ahead of us. In fact, he was gone before the spring air made the trees unsuitable for large-scale cutting. He was going to Sweden to visit his mother. He had long been thinking of surprising her, one early spring day, at the old homestead in

1

Landing in Canada

For one who, in his early youth, had become entranced by the rise of idealistic movements in turn-of-the-century Sweden and had been drawn by the political appeals of the Social Democratic labor movement, a transition to the timber forests of central Canada could hardly have been considered a step in the right direction. In October 1907, when I and a number of other, more experienced lumberjacks crossed the threshold of one of Ontario's numerous lumber camps, I had reason to feel uprooted, and a wave of homesickness engulfed my twenty-year-old soul with unmerciful strength. The preceding summer, my first in this new country, had familiarized me with the bitterness of this feeling, but my surroundings at that time had been a city where I not only had relatives but also newly won friends. Now, however, I felt as though the last contacts with civilization had been broken. Had it not been for the soothing peace of the giant forest and the good companionship of my fellow workers, I might well have made an about-face at the door when I caught sight of the bearded lumberjacks' faces inside the hut. However foreign and unapproachable the little town of Port Arthur may have seemed during the summer, it held for me, at that very moment, all the qualities of a good old hometown, as compared with all the rough- hewn dwellings and inhabitants of this frontier district in the heart of the timber forests of a strange, new country.

At that point, only six months had elapsed since my arrival as an immigrant in the city of Port Arthur, located on the north shore of Lake Superior. During the Atlantic crossing, my traveling companion had been my uncle B. A. Bengtsson, whose business was street and water mains, and who was just returning from a visit back home.[1] On my arrival in Port Arthur, I was "adopted" into my uncle's household, but as none of my eight cousins spoke Swedish or shared my ideological interests, there was no prospect of our becoming better acquainted. My first summer in this new country was, therefore, both long and boring, but it was also typical of what happened to thousands of young immigrant Swedes who wound up on the fringes of the major Swedish settlements on the North American continent.

In that Canadian lumber camp, I was thrown together with total strangers. Yet my two companions, who were also Swedes and well acquainted with the customs of forest life, were of great help to me, and they willingly initiated me into the ways, routines, and customs of lumber

Edberg, Herman Hallstrom, K. A. Helsberg, and Frithjof Werenskjold.[23]

In a highly interesting discussion of the cultural situation of the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America in the early twentieth century, Karl A. Olsson points out that the Swedish-American labor movement,

> so vigorous, so impassioned, so idealistic, had virtually no contact with the Mission Friends or any other religious group in Swedish-America. The two movements lived in water-tight compartments. Bengtson [*sic*], himself, was and is a religious man, but it is safe to say that neither he nor anyone else, interested in the labor movement, was permitted to carry on a meaningful conversation in this area with the Swedish-American community in which he worshipped.[24]

Bengston seems to have written little publicly on his religious belief and practice. In a letter to E. Gustav Johnson about the socialist Covenant pastor C. G. Ellstrom, he said, "What the rank and file of the Federation members thought of the Christian faith is hard to say, but I am sure they were not atheists. I never became one."[25] The absence of any mention of religion in biographical material about leaders of the Scandinavian federation suggests (as, by omission, does Bengston) that they *were* alienated from organized Christianity. It is of interest in this context that Karl A. von Lehnsburg, a Methodist minister of High Point, Washington, was in 1925, shortly before his death, planning a monthly paper, *Ariel*, "for Christian living and thinking," which would probably have had a Christian Socialist character.[26] Not only was von Lehnsburg an outspoken opponent of war and social injustice, but Emil Friborg, Carl A. Larson, and Olaf W. Newman, three of the four people he named as interested in the paper, held similar views.[27]

Margit Fredrickson has stated that Henry and Hildur Bengston, her parents, sent her to the Cuyler Swedish Evangelical Mission Church on North Marshfield Avenue and to a Sunday school run by teachers from the Moody Bible Institute and that her father was an admirer of Preston Bradley, the Unitarian minister of the People's Church, Chicago, although he did not become a member of the church. Bengston's interest in Bradley presumably flourished in the 1930s and early 1940s, for, in describing the impact of the Second World War on his family, he writes that on December 7, 1941, the Bengstons were "as usual" on a Sunday listening to the radio broadcast from the Church of the People, when the attack on Pearl Harbor

was reported to them. Later in the forties, Margit Fredrickson says, her father joined Irving Park Lutheran Church, Chicago, of which he was still a member when I got to know him in the late sixties.[28]

When Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet (National Society for the Maintenance of Swedish Culture Abroad) extended its activities to the United States in 1910, the leadership of the American group was taken by college and university professors and ministers of religion.[29] Their numbers were much reduced by the 1950s, by which time the American chapters had taken the name Svenska Kulturförbundet i Amerika (Swedish Cultural Society of America), and in the years 1958-1969, during which Bengston edited the society's magazine *Kulturarvet* (The Cultural Inheritance), the three most conspicuous contributors were all survivors of the radical movement: the editor himself, who wrote a number of valuable signed articles as well as the usual unsigned editorial matter; Walfrid Engdahl, a former Wobbly; and the poet Arthur Landfors, a Communist sympathizer in the 1930s and 1940s.[30] The banner of Swedish literary culture was being upheld by the radicals of former days, between whom and the Society's members there would have been little sympathy or contact fifty years before.

Although there are occasional notes of self-doubt, perhaps even self-denigration, in the unpublished "Autobiography" and in the article series published in *Emigranten/Bryggan*,[31] and although the letter to Allen Blomquist, quoted above, expresses regret over the time he had given to what turned out to be a lost cause, Henry Bengston must be judged to have led a rich and satisfying life. Attention should be given, though, to a lost opportunity that he never, to my knowledge, discussed in print and that he never mentioned in our talks. The editor's introduction of part 2 of "Upplevelser östanhavs och västanhavs" quotes some words of Valdemar Dahlgren, Bengston's old teacher, in his last illness: "Henry was the best student I ever had. Had he stayed in Sweden, he would have certainly become a landshövding."[32] It is virtually certain that some of the leaders of the Swedish-American labor movement could have carved out careers of distinction in the Social Democratic Party or the trade union movement had they foreseen the coming social changes in Sweden and decided against emigration, and Bengston must be among their number. Whether he had that kind of ambition is another matter.

I have provided the reference notes and the two bibliographies for the present edition.

criticism or censure ("ingen kritik eller klander") of the book to point out that there was a place for further research into the early period of the Scandinavian-American socialist movement (including the Socialist Labor Party's Scandinavian propaganda), as well as into the 1920s and 1930s, when the Communists were the strongest, and in the end the only surviving, element. To this I would add that the considerable Scandinavian (again mostly Swedish) involvement in the Industrial Workers of the World calls for study. Much of the groundwork for these efforts has been laid by the collaborative efforts edited by Dirk Hoerder and identified in the Selected Bibliography of Works on the Swedish-American Radical Movement Published since 1955 (this volume).

Apart from the fact that Henry Bengston provides general guidance in a field where those without a reading knowledge of Swedish have been completely at sea, his book gives us valuable insights into the world of journalism and newspaper production, particularly illuminating (in chapters 21, "Peace Work under Ban," and 23, "The Storm Clouds Gather") the difficulties faced by the socialist press in wartime, and also suggesting (in chapter 12, "A Brush with King Alcohol") the connection between the Socialist Party Swedes and the temperance cause.[18] Chapter 22, "A Fateful Peace Demonstration," is perhaps the fullest account of the Rockford, Illinois, war resisters of 1917, while chapter 17, "In the Company of Labor Agitators and Itinerant Speakers," raises the question of the relationship between the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Swedish-American workers. Bengston concluded that the party lost interest in its emigrating members and supporters when they climbed the gangplank in Gothenburg.

In the early 1920s, after the Scandinavian Socialist Federation had irrevocably thrown in its lot with the Communist Party, Bengston could write that his heart was still with the Socialist Party, and indeed he continued to vote Socialist (Progressive in 1924, when Robert M. La Follette ran for president with Socialist support) throughout the decade, becoming, like so many other traditional Socialist voters, a Roosevelt supporter in the thirties.[19] But in a long letter to his Communist friend Allen Blomquist, of Pocatello, Idaho, he wrote revealingly and painfully:

> I feel my sympathy with the working class as warmly as ever, and it would not be hard to find a position where I too could fit in, if I thought it would be of slightest use. But I have really come to the conclusion that, just as the time I have already devoted to the labor movement was thrown away, it would be the same with the little I would be able to achieve in it in the future. . . .

> Perhaps this will make you look on me as a back-slider, and to some extent you would be right to do so. But the reason is, as you see, a conviction grown out of bitter experience. Believe me, Allen, during the time we were members of the same party I was unshakeably loyal, yes so loyal that when, on two different occasions, I was offered a better paid position elsewhere, I nevertheless stayed at my old job because I believed the party needed me. When later on you all condemned our common ideals as false and left the party I had placed before my own interests, something broke inside me, and I began to lose faith in the possibility of hastening the liberation of the workers from economic oppression by organizations of class struggle. Then I began to think without consulting the theories of Marx or anyone else and came gradually to my present conviction.[20]

The strength of Bengston's feeling was still palpable over forty years later. In our conversations between 1966 and 1972, he returned to the theme that the "backsliding" of the Scandinavian Socialist Federation had killed any desire to take an active part in radical politics. One aspect that was particularly painful to him was that in 1920 the left (who were to become Communists) promised the Federation a glorious future, whereas the history of the new organization turned out, generally speaking, to be one of decline.

Two other points arise from the letter to Blomquist. Bengston's emphasis throughout is much more on the Socialist Party than on the Federation as such, which suggests that the widely held view of the foreign language federations as little more than European socialist parties on American soil is not always justified. Another and (as it reflects Bengston's own character) most significant feature is that he was writing in the most friendly way and in terms suggesting that he and Blomquist had been on good terms for some time—this only four years after their political parting of the ways and at a time when, although worse was to come during the so-called third period at the end of the decade, the Socialist Party (whose general outlook Bengston shared) and the Communists felt no love for each other. Similarly, Bengston remained friends with the Communists Gust Björk and Oscar W. Larson.[21] How close he was to N. Juel Christensen and Gustaf L. Larson is not clear, but he plainly respected both men.[22] He also maintained his friendships with a number of people who had belonged to the social democratic group in the Scandinavian Socialist Federation. Frank Hurop has been mentioned already, but one should also name Gideon

labor tradition.[5] Bengston had developed for the System Press a strong line in printing high school publications and in work for the Swedish Baptist General Conference (now the Baptist General Conference), which carried the business successfully through the Depression. He was also able to strengthen his links with the general Chicago Swedish community through activity in the sick benefit society, Independent Order of Svithiod.[6]

Although Bengston was no longer in touch with the Socialist Party, or even voting Socialist after the rise of Roosevelt, he formed a friendly relationship with the Social Democratic and labor union movement in Sweden, which seems to have been mature when Hulda Flood visited Chicago in 1935, at which time she began to encourage him to write down his memories of the Scandinavian Socialist Federation.[7] In the postwar years, a number of Social Democratic journalists "looked up the party sympathizer in Keystone Avenue."[8] Hulda Flood's encouragement and the efforts made by representatives of the labor movement of Sweden in the 1930s and 1940s to collect historical source material seem to have emboldened Bengston to produce an account of the Swedish (or Scandinavian) socialist movement in America, probably during the late 1940s and early 1950s. He seems to have been disappointed with the results of the rescue operation from Sweden, although in fact substantial runs of newspapers and periodicals and a considerable amount of archival material did find their way to Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek (the Archives and Library of the Labor Movement) in Stockholm. Unfortunately, this considerable degree of success seems never to have been publicized in the United States (and perhaps not in Sweden).[9] As late as 1945, it seems that Arbetarrörelsens arkiv and LO (Landsorganisationen, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation) were to have been responsible for the compilation of the American movement's history, but this did not come about.[10]

In the event, Bengston decided that he himself would have to be the recorder: "I decided to limit myself to recall my own experiences and to do whatever research I would be able to do under the circumstances." It should be noted that this was going on while he was still involved full time with the System Press, so it is not surprising that the research and writing took five years. Bengston suggests in "Autobiography" that the document was prepared for a pigeonhole in the Swedish Labor Archives, but in the summer of 1949, he lent his "nearly finished manuscript" to Hulda Flood, who advised him to send the finished work to Tidens förlag, the Social Democratic publishing house in Stockholm. Tiden refused it on the ground that "there is not enough interest in reading of that kind," but apparently

owing to the efforts of a group including Hulda Flood, Einar Ljungberg, and Ture Nerman (all of whom will be met with in the following pages), Arbetarnas kulturhistoriska sällskap arranged for its publication.[11]

Henry Bengston writes in his preface, "My own purely personal experiences have, of course, no historical value in and of themselves."[12] Few of his readers will agree with this disclaimer. It is surely the firsthand reminiscences that give the book its value, not only because of the charm, modesty, and humor of the writing but because they take us right into the heart of the subject. Others could and *may* have written of their experiences, but no one who has done so has reached the printed page in more than a fragmentary way.

One or two things should be said about the scope of the book, however. In the first place, does it deal with Scandinavians or Swedes? The language federations of the Socialist Labor, Socialist, and Communist Parties (a "propaganda league" in the case of the Industrial Workers of the World) certainly bore the name Scandinavian, no doubt on grounds of expediency, since the numbers of Danes and Norwegians involved seem to have been relatively small and could not have justified federations of their own. Bengston himself estimated that about 70 percent of the Socialist Federation membership was Swedish,[13] while after the closure of the Chicago Danish-Norwegian paper *Arbejderen* in 1900, the Socialist Labor Party seems to have been active among Swedes alone of the Scandinavian ethnic groups.[14] Nevertheless, as long as Bengston was writing about the federations, then his scope *was* to some extent Scandinavian. But he did not mention the important Norwegian socialist paper in Minneapolis, *Gaa Paa* (Forward, 1903-1925),[15] or *Nye Normanden* (The New Norwegian, 1894-1909) of Moorhead, Minnesota, both of which had circulations not much less than that of Bengston's own *Svenska Socialisten* but which were not organizationally linked with the Socialist Party.[16] For this reason, it has seemed desirable to go back to the title of the original typescript in the Bengston papers in the Swedish-American Archives of Greater Chicago at North Park College: *On the Left in America: Memories of the Scandinavian-American Labor Movement* ("På vänsterflygeln i USA. Minnen från den Skandinavisk-Amerikanska arbetarrörelsens dagar," the word "Skandinaver" having been penciled in before "På").[17] It is not known who made the change; it may have been a suggestion from the publishers, in search of an appealing title. The result was to downplay the book's autobiographical element and suggest that it was more of a comprehensive treatise than its author ever claimed it to be.

In his review in *Vasa Star*, Arthur Landfors wrote that it was no

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Editor's Introduction

In 1955, Henry Bengston's *Skandinaver på vänsterflygeln i USA* (Scandinavians on the Left in the USA) was published in Stockholm by Kooperativa förbundets bokförlag (Cooperative Union Press), for Arbetarnas kulturhistoriska sällskap (Workers Cultural History Society). It was the first, leaving aside books about Joe Hill, until the publication in 1987 of Per Nordahl's *De sålde sina penslar* (They Sold Their Paint Brushes), and the only book-length treatment of its subject, which was widely reviewed in the newspaper press of Sweden. I do not know how much attention it received in the United States, but I have read the notices in the *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* and *Vasa Star*.[1] Bengston says in his "Autobiography" that the book received friendly reviews by E. Gustav Johnson in *Svenska Amerikanaren-Tribunen* (Chicago) and by Henning Nelson, the editor of the paper, in *Svea* (Worcester, Massachusetts).[2] According to the *Vasa Star* review (by the poet Arthur Landfors, and strangely delayed by three years), the book could be ordered from *Svenska Amerikanaren-Tribunen*, from the New York newspaper *Nordstjernan*, or directly from the publisher. It is doubtful whether a book in Swedish, published in the 1950s, on the history of the radical movement could have attained a large readership in America. An anecdote gives some idea of the intellectual and emotional climate of Swedish America at that time: a senior, and knowledgeable, member of the Swedish Pioneer (now Swedish-American) Historical Society said to me at one of the annual meetings in the late 1960s or early 1970s, "I didn't know Henry Bengston had been a member of the Socialist Party—he looks just like an elder in the Covenant Church."

Since Bengston's book is largely autobiographical and since it can be supplemented by the material, mostly on his nonpolitical activities, published in *Emigranten/Bryggan*, it suffices to say here that after his withdrawal from the Scandinavian Socialist Federation (SSF) in 1920, he gave almost all of his energies during the rest of the decade to building up his Chicago printing business, the System Press, in the interests of providing economic security for his wife, Hildur, and daughter, Margit. His partner in this enterprise was Jens A. Fenstad, a Norwegian who had been foreman of the Scandinavian Socialist Federation's printing shop.[3] During this period, Bengston wrote to an old Danish-American socialist friend, Frank Hurop, "I . . . have really no time for activity in the Socialist Party, although my heart is still there."[4] However, he did form a connection with the Verdandi Study League (Studieförbundet Verdandi) and, through it, with the long-lived Swedish Educational League (Svenska Bildnings-förbundet), both of which combined Swedish ethnic character with participation in the radical